

Eddic, Skaldic, and Beyond

**Eddic, Skaldic
Beyond Poetic Variety in
Medieval Iceland**

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EDDIC, SKALDIC, AND BEYOND

Poetic Variety in Medieval Iceland
& Norway EDITED BY MARTIN CHASE



EDDIC, SKALDIC, AND BEYOND

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EDDIC, SKALDIC, AND BEYOND

*Poetic Variety in Medieval
Iceland and Norway*

EDITED BY MARTIN CHASE

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INTRODUCTION

Martin Chase

For at least a century, it has been customary to divide the vernacular poetry of medieval Scandinavia into two genre categories: eddic poetry (*eddukvæði*) and skaldic poetry (*dróttkvæði*). What counts as “skaldic” and what counts as “eddic” has as much to do with traditional and conventional labels as it does with characteristics of the poetry itself.

The designation “skaldic” has been assigned to poetry by known authors (skalds) that follows the system of metrics and diction explained by Snorri Sturluson in his *Edda*, a three-part guide to the poetic art of the skalds. The *Snorra Edda*, apparently conceived as a poetic manual intended to facilitate the comprehension and appreciation of the poetry of the Viking-Age skalds for thirteenth-century readers, has been enormously influential. Almost from the time of its composition, it has been regarded not just as a guide to understanding skaldic poetry, but as the definer and arbiter of the genre: the extent to which poetry conforms to or deviates from Snorri’s rules for poetic composition in the *Snorra Edda* has traditionally determined the judgment of its quality, or indeed, whether it is even deserving of the name “skaldic.” The first part of the *Snorra Edda*, *Gylfaginning*, recounts in narrative form myths associated with traditional Nordic religion. A knowledge of the myths is necessary to understand the allusions to them in the elaborate kennings—periphrastic metaphors characteristic of skaldic diction—which subsequently are treated in *Skáldskaparmál*, the middle section of the work. *Gylfaginning*, in many cases the only textual witness of the stories it recounts, has often been regarded as an authentic literary record of the myths of the pre-Christian North. The last section of the *Snorra Edda*, *Háttatal*, defines and gives examples of the intricate, syllable-counting meters of the skalds.

Skáld means in Old Norse (and Modern Icelandic) simply “poet,” and the corresponding adjective (Old Norse *skáldligr*, Modern Icelandic *skáldlegur*) means “poetic,” in the most general sense of the word. The adjective has been documented just twice in medieval contexts, in two different versions of *Hallfreðar saga*.¹ In the earlier occurrence, from *Möðruvallabók* (Reykjavík, AM 132, fol.), Hallfreðr tells King Óláfr Tryggvason that the Christian doctrine the king has compelled him to

learn is “ecki skalldligri” (no more poetic) than the poem he has composed.² It is unclear whether Hallfreðr is contrasting the form or the content of the doctrine with his poem, but he is certainly not using the word to distinguish a particular style of poetry. The later occurrence is in the *Flateyjarbók* version of the saga: Hallfreðr meets Earl Hákon and asks for a hearing, to which the earl amiably replies, “líkligr værir þu at skalldligt værj kuæde þitt ok skaltu hlíod fa” (You look as though your poem would be poetical, and you will receive a hearing).³ The words *skjaldedigt* and *skjaldekvad* (both meaning “skaldic poem”) occur in Danish authors as early as the eighteenth century as terms for any form of Old Norse-Icelandic poetry, and while they continued to be used in this broad sense by authors like Adam Oehlenslæger and N. F. S. Grundtvig, we see derivations of “skald” as a genre label in scholarly works as early as P. E. Müller’s “Om Authentien af Snorres Edda” (1812). Here Müller defines “Skaldekunst” as poetry composed according to Snorri’s rules, and regards it as a genre fundamentally different from what we find in “Sæmunds Edda.”⁴ Nevertheless, it was long before the term became standardized. The Swedish scholar Theodor Wisén’s 1886 edition of skaldic poetry refers to it as *Carmina Norræna* (Old Norse poetry),⁵ and the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* published in England by Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell divides the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus into “Court Poetry” and “Eddic Poetry”⁶ (*Old Norse Court Poetry* is likewise the title of Roberta Frank’s now-classic study of skaldic poetry⁷). The term *skaldic* eventually gained currency through its use by Danish scholars, and became definitive following the publication of Finnur Jónsson’s *Norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, which was to be for a century the standard edition of skaldic poetry.⁸ Modern Icelandic usage normally refers to skaldic poetry as *dróttkvæði* (literally “court poetry”), the Old Norse name for the meter used in most (but by no means all) skaldic poetry. The term *skáldakvæði* occurs occasionally in twentieth-century Icelandic scholarship, but should probably be considered a Danism. Finnur Jónsson’s use of the word may well have given it the meaning it has today.

The traditional definition of “eddic” poetry is somewhat easier to articulate: in the most narrow sense of the word, it refers to the thirty-one poems contained in the manuscript GKS 2365, 4to (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum). The manuscript, also known as Codex Regius, is a poetic anthology produced ca. 1275, although many of the texts are clearly much older. The poems in this collection, all anonymous, deal with wisdom, Germanic mythology, and heroic legend. The name “Edda,” when applied to this manuscript, is not medieval: it was assigned to the collection in the seventeenth century by Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson, the re-discoverer

of the codex. Brynjólfur saw thematic similarities (stories from Nordic mythology) with the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, and mistakenly believed its author to be the eleventh-century Icelander Sæmundr Sigfússon. He named it *Sæmundar Edda* as a counterpart to the *Snorra Edda* (the medieval title of Snorri's work), and ever since, it has been known as the Poetic or Elder Edda, and the style of its poems as "eddic." The term "eddic poetry," then, has often been used to refer to this particular collection of poems, rather than to a genre with specific characteristics. While there are indeed characteristics that more or less distinguish the poems (anonymous authorship, non-syllable-counting meters, mythical and legendary rather than historical themes), there are other poems with the same characteristics that are preserved elsewhere and thus not always considered "eddic."

The definition, however, is applied with varying degrees of precision by scholars, and there is no firm agreement about precisely what poetry counts as eddic. Manuscript Copenhagen, AM 748 I a, 4to, is a fragmentary thirteenth-century manuscript that contains six of the Codex Regius poems as well as a seventh, *Baldrs draumar*. The two manuscripts stem from a common source, and it is generally agreed that *Baldrs draumar* is an integral part of the collection. The standard edition of the Poetic Edda is still *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* by Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, now in its fifth revised edition.⁹ The *verwandten Denkmäler*, which follow *Baldrs draumar* in an appendix, include the poems *Rígsþula*, *Hyndululjóð*, *Grottasöngur*, *Hljóðskviða*, and "Hildebrand's Death Song," as well as thirteen fragments from the *Snorra Edda* and five from *Völsunga saga*. This group thus forms a kind of second tier of "eddic" poetry, not part of the Poetic Edda (i.e. Codex Regius), but closely associated with it. Yet another tier is a group of poems from the *fornaldarsögur*, often called "eddic minora," the name given to them in the edition by Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch.¹⁰ These poems are somewhat later than the earliest poems of the Codex Regius, but many are contemporary with the latest, and they clearly have stylistic and thematic affinities. The riddles from *Hervarar saga* discussed by Hannah Burrows in this volume belong to this group.

While what counts as eddic poetry is not a contentious issue, there is a variety of scholarly opinion. Terry Gunnell, in his recent article on "Eddic Poetry" in the *Blackwell Companion to Old Norse Literature and Culture*, takes the conservative approach:

It must always be remembered that when scholars refer to eddic poetry, or the Poetic Edda, they usually mean the contents of a single, fairly insignificant-looking, medieval manuscript known as the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda, rather than a genre defined on

the basis of a particular school of authorship or literary style. The manuscript in question, written c. 1270, contains a body of 29 poetic works in Old Norse-Icelandic, 10 of them dealing with mythological material, and 19 with Scandinavian and Germanic heroes of ancient times.¹¹

Peter Hallberg, in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*,¹² likewise prefers to limit the term to the contents of the one manuscript. Ursula Dronke includes *Rígsþula*¹³ and *Grottasöngur*¹⁴ interspersed among the poems from Codex Regius without comment in her edition of the Poetic Edda; she treats *Baldrs draumar* briefly as an appendix to *Völuspá*.¹⁵ Her planned multi-volume edition remains uncompleted after her death in 2012, and it is unclear whether (or why) she planned to include other poems from outside Codex Regius. Carolynne Larrington's translation adds *Baldrs draumar*, *Rígsþula*, *Hyndluljóð*, and *Grottasöngur* following the poems of the Codex Regius as the "most important" of "other poems in the eddic style,"¹⁶ and Andy Orchard follows suit in his translation and presents these same four as an appendix.¹⁷ The eight-volume Frankfurt *Edda-Kommentar* casts a wider net and treats all the poems printed in the Neckel-Kuhn edition.¹⁸ Jón Helgason, in his classic introduction to *Norges og Islands Digting* is still more inclusive:

As early as the seventeenth century, Icelandic copyists noticed that there were poems of the same type as those in Codex Regius, and they included them in their copies of the Edda. Later, when the poems were printed, publishers followed their example. *Edda* thus became a common name for all the poems found in Codex Regius as well as other poems with similar characteristics.¹⁹

The *KLNM* entry on "Eddadiktning" by Anne Holtsmark likewise suggests that based on age, form, and content, not only the second-tier poems, but also the eddica minora and poems like *Sólarljóð*, *Grógaldur*, and *Fiqsvinnsmál* should be regarded as eddic poetry.²⁰ Joseph Harris observes that the inclusive and restrictive points of view both have their merits. The argument for inclusivity is that "all three groups properly belong ... to the same field of study since, with the exception of the 'accidents' of manuscript preservation, there are no important consistent differences from one group to another."²¹ Yet there is also reason to concentrate on "the Poetic Edda proper, and this focus is justified by the assured age of the poems (before 1270), the nearly complete state of the manuscript, and the carefully thought-out nature of the collection by comparison to the haphazard preservation of the poems of the appendix and the preservation of the *eddica minora* only in narrative contexts." Harris rightly points out that were there not a

central collection, there would be no point of association for the other “eddic” poems.²²

Moreover, as Terry Gunnell has observed, a “generalized classification tends to obscure the variety and individuality of the works in question.”²³ The “eddic” poems not only have features in common with “skaldic” poems: they also have features that distinguish them significantly from one another. Gunnell describes the Codex Regius as “first and foremost a thematic collection of material from differing backgrounds” (comparable to the *Carmina Burana*).²⁴ While it seems right to acknowledge the monumental and unique nature of the collection (Carolynne Larrington calls the compilation comparable to the *Kalevala*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, and the *Mahabharata*²⁵), to make it a genre definer relegates all the other poetry of the period, regardless of its style or context, to the category “skaldic.”

Margaret Clunies Ross’s *History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*,²⁶ published in 2005, is perhaps the first comprehensive study not to have an organizational structure featuring the two-genre division between eddic and skaldic poetry. Noting that the eddic/skaldic distinction “is by no means an absolute one,” she steers us in the right direction by using the qualified designations “eddic-type” or “eddic-style” and “skaldic-type” or “skaldic-style” poetry. Her study proceeds chronologically rather than according to anachronistic genre distinctions. Clunies Ross observes that “no one criterion divides eddic-type poetry from that usually called skaldic,”²⁷ and states that her own preference “would be to abandon these two words as contrastive and exclusive terms.”²⁸ Hers is not the only voice that makes this point. As far back as 1985, Roberta Frank, writing in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, protested that “five hundred years of poetic composition surely deserve shelving in more than two pigeonholes,”²⁹ although her eloquent discussion and argument for a more nuanced system of classification is ironically situated in the context of her chapter on “Skaldic Poetry”—the counterpart to Joseph Harris’s on “Eddic Poetry” in the same volume.

The state-of-the-art Icelandic literary history *Íslensk Bókmennta Saga*³⁰ reasserts the traditional contrasting terms of classification laid out by Jón Helgason in *Norges og Islands Digtning*:

Eddic poetry takes its themes from stories of the gods or heroes of Icelandic pre-history, or at times from the rules for living found in traditional wisdom literature. Skaldic poetry is most often composed in praise of someone still living or recently deceased, or at least refers to events that have recently occurred. Eddic poetry is composed in simple meters, and its diction is not overly obscure;

skaldic poetry uses different, much more difficult meters and a poetic language that must be learned through careful training if it is to be understood. Eddic poetry is anonymous, while most skaldic poems are ascribed to named poets.³¹

Nevertheless, even these broad distinctions are marked by fluid boundaries: there are poems that resemble the eddic poems in content, but are composed in skaldic meters, and there are likewise poems composed about chieftains who have recently died or events of current interest—the subject matter of skaldic verse—while their form would classify them as eddic.³²

While *Íslensk Bókmennta Saga* nevertheless proceeds to discuss Old Norse-Icelandic poetry under the rubrics of “Eddukvæði” and “Dróttkvæði,” it has additional chapters on “Kristileg Trúarkvæði til Loka 13. Aldar” (Christian Poetry to the End of the Thirteenth Century)³³ and “Kveðskapur frá Síðmiðöldum” (Poetry from the Late Middle Ages).³⁴ The English-language *Blackwell Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* from about the same time as *Íslensk Bókmennta Saga* similarly has articles on “Christian Poetry”³⁵ and “Late Secular Poetry”³⁶ in addition to the expected chapters on “Eddic Poetry”³⁷ and “Skaldic Poetry.”³⁸

There is a need not only for more nuanced subcategories, but for a sharper definition of the two overarching categories. While it clearly makes sense to publish a more-or-less coherent collection from a single source like the Codex Regius, the rationale for collections of “eddic” or “skaldic” poetry is less certain. Gustav Neckel chose a fairly wide boundary for his *Edda* edition. Finnur Jónsson, for his landmark edition of what has come to be regarded as “the skaldic corpus,” chose to gather all the Old West Norse alliterative poetry that was composed before about 1400 and is neither eddic nor belonging to the Icelandic *rímur* genre.³⁹ But this definition may be too broad to be really useful: it focuses entirely on what skaldic poetry is not, and as Margaret Clunies Ross comments, it “somewhat begs the question of what eddic poetry is”⁴⁰—not to mention what *rímur* are and what post-1400, non-eddic, non-*rímur* Old West Norse alliterative poetry might be. Clunies Ross and her fellow editors needed to revisit this question as they made plans for the new *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, an enormous project meant to supersede Finnur Jónsson’s *Skjaldedigtning*. What should be included in a comprehensive edition? The editors decided to capitulate to tradition (their word), at least to some extent, and “refrained from editing the Poetic Edda corpus, while including all other Old Norse poetry up to the end of the fourteenth century.”⁴¹ Included in their definition of “all other Old Norse poetry” are the poems from the *fornaldarsögur*—though “again

conventionally, this edition excludes *rímur*, even though the earliest *ríma*, Einarr Gilsson's *Óláfs ríma Haraldssonar*, dates from the mid-fourteenth century."⁴²

The critical assessment of Old Norse-Icelandic poetry has varied according to the tastes of the times. The earliest citation for "skaldic" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* occurs in Max Müller's schematization of the eddic-skaldic distinction in his *Lectures on the Science of Language*, published in 1861. For Müller, the first Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford, the poems of the Codex Regius clearly have primacy:

The old poetry which flourished in Norway in the eighth century, and which was cultivated by the skalds in the ninth, would have been lost in Norway itself had it not been for the jealous care with which it was preserved by the emigrants of Iceland. The most important branch of their traditional poetry were short songs (hliod or Quida), relating the deeds of their gods and heroes.... They were collected in the middle of the twelfth century by *Saemund Sigfusson* (died 1133). In 1643 a similar collection was discovered in MSS. of the thirteenth century, and published under the title of *Edda*, or Great-Grandmother.⁴³

Müller has little but contempt for skaldic poetry:

This "Skalda,"⁴⁴ and the rules which it contains, represent the state of poetry in the thirteenth century; and nothing can be more artificial, nothing more different from the genuine poetry of the old "Edda" than this *Ars poetica* of Snorri Sturluson.... The specimens of ancient poetry which Snorri quotes are taken from the skalds, whose names are well known in history, and who lived from the tenth to the thirteenth century. But he never quotes from any song contained in the old "Edda," whether it be that those songs were considered by himself as belonging to a different and much more ancient period of literature, or that they could not be used in illustration of the scholastic rules of skaldic poets, these very rules being put to shame by the simple style of the national poetry, which expressed what it had to express without effort and circumlocution.⁴⁵

Müller's assessment reflects the tastes of many of his nineteenth-century contemporaries. The eddic poems, with their flowing meters and narratives of passion, were considered to be older and somehow more authentic than the intricately wrought, intensely self-conscious poetry of the skalds. As the Romantic movement faded, however, skaldic poetry once more became an object of interest. Scholarly

advances began to reveal that much eddic poetry was not as ancient as had previously been thought, and that while the earliest surviving eddic poems may be slightly older than the earliest skaldic poems, in general it can be said that eddic and skaldic poetry are spread across the same historical span.⁴⁶ The similarities of eddic poetry to Old English and Old High German poetry became more apparent, and in the eyes of many, it was the skaldic poetry that could claim to be more distinctly Nordic. Indeed, one of the characteristics that distinguishes eddic from common Germanic poetry—division into stanzas—now appears to be the result of skaldic influence. What seemed artificial to the Romantics appeared artistic to many twentieth-century readers, who took at least as much delight in the extravagant form and compressed diction of the skaldic poems as in the riveting stories and elusive myths of the eddic.

Periodization, like genre classification, has been determined by conventions peculiar to the discipline. The term “medieval” has normally not been used in this context. In Icelandic, *miðaldir* (Middle Ages) has traditionally been understood as a concept rooted in—and relevant to—European, rather than Nordic history and literature. *Íslensk Orðabók*, the comprehensive dictionary of the Icelandic language, gives two definitions of *miðaldir*:

(in European history) the period from about 375 to about 1500 (1492 or 1517); (in Icelandic history) the period from about 1300–1350 up to and beyond the Reformation.⁴⁷

Recent studies of English literature have revisited the question of the usefulness of the term, given the shifting landscape of both cultural developments and literary conventions that has been used to define it; the assumption of most Icelandic scholars was that a concept of the Middle Ages was not helpful in their own context. Consequently, to the extent the term “medieval” has been used at all in Old Norse-Icelandic literary history, it has been applied somewhat dismissively to texts and authors from the centuries preceding and following the Reformation that show a clear relationship to what is regarded as “medieval” English and European literature. Neither conventionally “skaldic” nor “eddic,” nor indeed distinctively Nordic, this body of poetry, despite the high literary quality of some of it, has received little scholarly attention.

Language can be helpful as a criterion for classification, but here, too, there is need for more study. In recent years the term *miðíslenska* (Middle Icelandic) has been adopted by Icelandic scholars as a name for the language of Iceland from the fourteenth century, the traditional end of the Old Norse period, up to the seventeenth (*Íslensk Orðabók* says from 1350–1540).⁴⁸ This was a time of dramatic flux for

the Icelandic language, not least due to the language contact that came with printing, international trade, and the Danish colonial administration. While there have been some noteworthy (even monumental) studies of Middle Icelandic language,⁴⁹ it has not received anywhere near the attention that has been given to the earlier Old Norse-Icelandic, and much more work is needed.

All of the contributions to this volume are in one way or another concerned with the blurring of boundaries between genres and periods. Many of the texts and topics taken up here have been difficult to categorize and have consequently received less attention than they perhaps deserve. The boundaries between genres (skaldic and eddic), periods (Viking Age, medieval, early modern) or cultures (Icelandic, Scandinavian, English, continental) may not have been as sharp in the eyes and ears of contemporary authors and audiences as they seem to our own. When questions of classification are allowed to fall into the background, at least temporarily, it can become easier to appreciate the poetry on its own terms, rather than focus on its ability or failure to live up to anachronistic expectations. In some cases, these essays present new material for consideration; in others, they revisit long-held assumptions about authors and texts and challenge or suggest revision of them. They reflect the idea that poetry with “medieval” characteristics continued to be produced in Iceland well beyond the fifteenth century—the traditional end of the medieval period of Scandinavian and English literature—and even beyond the Protestant Reformation in Iceland (1550), which is often regarded as the end of the Middle Ages there. This is at least partly—and perhaps primarily—due to the persistence of a flourishing manuscript culture in Iceland. Printing was controlled by the church, which meant that printed works tended to reflect Reformation and early modern sensibilities, while the manuscript tradition continued to be a place where more traditional tastes could thrive and develop. All of these studies point out the need for more work: much research has been focused on the “best” skaldic poetry (that which follows Snorri’s definitions most closely) and the most purely Nordic and Germanic of the eddic poems, but poetry that slides across the boundaries of genre or periodization or cultural origin has tended to be left by the wayside. Some of the articles present new and persuasive evidence, some submit possible interpretations for consideration and evaluation, and some hope to awaken interest in and appreciation for, as Shaun Hughes puts it, “unpublished (and undervalued) materials.”

The first two studies—“The Sources of Merlínússpá: Gunnlaugr Leifsson’s Use of Texts Additional to the *De gestis Britonum* of Geoffrey of Monmouth” by Russell Poole, and Ingvil Brügger Budal’s “The Genesis of *Strengleikar*: Scribes, Translators, and Place of

Origin”—deal with early thirteenth-century translations into Old Norse of twelfth-century Latin and Old French texts. Neither purely eddic nor skaldic (or perhaps both/and), these are learned works with complex textual histories that set them in international contexts. *Merlínússþá*, the subject of Russell Poole’s study, is an Icelandic verse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s prose *Prophetiae Merlini* (not to be confused with John of Cornwall’s poem of the same name) by Gunnlaugr Leifsson, a Benedictine monk of Þingeyrar in the north of Iceland who died about 1218. Geoffrey’s text, redacted in its present form in the period 1121–38,⁵⁰ was eventually incorporated into his *De gestis Britonum* (also known as *Historia regum Britanniae*), although it continued to be copied independently, as well, and Gunnlaugr’s translation dates from about 1200.⁵¹ Gunnlaugr’s *Merlínússþá* likewise exists as a text within a text, embedded in the Icelandic translation of *De gestis Britonum*, presumably also by Gunnlaugr, known as *Breta sögur*, which survives in a single copy in the Icelandic encyclopedic codex *Hauksbók* (ca. 1300). In the present study, Poole brings new evidence and offers hypotheses about the composition and context of *Merlínússþá*. He evaluates J. S. Eysteinnsson’s theory that *Merlínússþá* is not just a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Prophetiae Merlini*, but that it also draws on *De gestis Britonum*,⁵² and shows that while there are instances of correspondence, some of Eysteinnsson’s examples are inconclusive and one of them must be discounted. Poole suggests instead that *Merlínússþá* is related to other English texts: Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum*, William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta regum Anglorum*, and perhaps Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. *Merlínússþá* appears to be linked to Lincoln and Bishop Robert de Chesney, and Poole considers the possibility of a connection between Lincoln and Iceland. This is Gunnlaugr’s only known poetic work, and his only work in the vernacular: he is otherwise known as an author of historical and hagiographical texts.⁵³ Poole’s essay shows just how nuanced an approach a twelfth-century Iclander could take to British historiography.

Strengleikar, the subject of Ingvil Brügger Budal’s essay, is also a translation, but in this case a translation from vernacular poetry to prose: the *Strengleikar* are prose translations of French poems into Old Norse. Should they be regarded as poetry? As with works like Chaucer’s *Boece* (or Tatlock’s *Chaucer*⁵⁴), the answer is both yes and no. They belong to a poetic canon in French literature, but how do they fit into the Old Norse literary tradition? Budal argues that, as with *Merlínússþá*, there is an English connection. *Strengleikar* (literally, “stringed instruments”) is a collection of Old French chivalric *lais* translated into Old Norse and extant in a single Norwegian manuscript, DG 4–7 in the Uppsala University Library. The manuscript

dates from about 1270; the text of *Strengleikar* mentions King Hákon Hákonarson, who reigned from 1217 to 1263, as the commissioning patron. The Old French sources are known, and the Old Norse translations follow them closely, raising the questions of where, by whom, and from what exemplars they were made. How (and where) did French chivalric romances come into the hands of someone who could render them into Old Norse? Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane, the most recent editors of *Strengleikar*, proposed that *Strengleikar* is the work of a group of translators working in Norway, perhaps from Old French originals brought north by visiting French minstrels.⁵⁵ Budal's textual analysis and exploration of a possible context leads her to a new idea: the translations were rather made by a single Norwegian scribe residing in England. Her study of contemporary documents that mention Norwegian scribes working in England brings evidence that the translator was most likely at Reading Abbey or Oxford, and she offers a list of potential candidates.

Christopher Abram, Mikael Males, and Kevin J. Wanner all address questions surrounding the *Snorra Edda*. Christopher Abram's "Einarr Skúlason, Snorri Sturluson, and the Post-Pagan Mythological Kenning" examines the relationship of Snorri's work to the earlier skalds he cites. Viking-Age skaldic poetry contains many references to pagan gods, but the poetry of the eleventh century, the period immediately following Iceland's conversion to Christianity, scrupulously avoids them. Then, in the second half of the twelfth century, the pagan allusions reappear, notably in the poetry of the priest Einarr Skúlason, raising the need for Snorri to explain them in the thirteenth. There has been a long-standing scholarly discussion about how to account for this phenomenon: it is easy to understand why references to traditional religion would be taboo in the period following the official shift to Christianity, but why did they return? Were they now the object of antiquarian interest, or had they been there beneath the surface all along, waiting to re-emerge once they no longer were regarded as a threat to the new religion? Abram builds on and evaluates earlier studies by Guðrún Nordal,⁵⁶ Jan De Vries,⁵⁷ Hans Kuhn,⁵⁸ and Bjarne Fidjestøl,⁵⁹ and analyzes in detail the use of pagan references in three successive texts. He compares Einarr's *Øxarflokkr*,⁶⁰ the anonymous *Ásynjur-heiti þulur*,⁶¹ and Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*⁶² and finds evidence of an inter-textual relationship that shows the development of a common scholarly interest in collecting and preserving verbal artifacts from an earlier tradition. This comparison not only helps to explain the reappearance of the gods in skaldic poetry: Abram shows how it has wider implications for our understanding of the myths Snorri relates.

Mikael Males likewise investigates the idea of the *Snorra Edda* as an

antiquarian or archaizing text in “*Skáldskaparmál* as a Tool for Composition of Pseudonymous Skaldic Poetry.” He sees Snorri’s work, situated in an era when earlier styles of poetry had again become fashionable, not only as an archival collection of examples of an admired tradition, but also as a tool for “the creation of an imposing literary past.” The saga authors of the late Middle Ages liked to use the form known as *prosimetrum*, the insertion of stanzas of poetry into prose texts, where the poetry could either have a dramatic function (in family sagas) or serve as authentication (in historical sagas). Males looks at a variety of examples of verse in the sagas and shows how, in many instances, poetry that is in fact contemporary with the prose narrative has been made to look archaic with the help of the guidelines of the *Snorra Edda*. Like Christopher Abram, Males reconsiders Snorri’s authority as a mythographer and suggests that if Snorri’s intention was to show how to compose new poetry that looks old, we should not expect a high degree of authenticity from his mythic narratives: Snorri’s authorial stance is more creative than preservationist, and his accounts of the gods are meant as examples of how to archaize rather than as genuine historical witnesses.

Snorri was an innovative and nuanced user of language, and his poetic references to Christian concepts can be as challenging as his use of pagan associations. In “*Háttatal* Stanza 12 and the Divine Legitimation of Kings,” Kevin J. Wanner sorts out a conundrum that has long frustrated readers of Snorri. *Háttatal* (*List of Meters*) is the third part of *Snorra Edda*, a technical tour de force in which Snorri displays the formal variety of skaldic verse.⁶³ The subjects of this long poem, composed while Snorri was in service at the Norwegian court, are Jarl Skúli Bárðarson and King Hákon Hákonarson (the commissioner of *Strengleikar* mentioned above), longtime rivals for ruling power in early-thirteenth-century Norway. The poem purports to be in praise of both men, but as Wanner demonstrates, Snorri makes clear in a variety of ways that he holds with Jarl Skúli. The subject of this essay is the one perplexing exception, stanza 12, where Snorri states that Hákon has been granted his kingship by the grace of God. Using linguistic and formal analysis as well as the Weberian theory of charisma, Wanner argues that Snorri can reconcile the discrepancy between God’s choice of Hákon as the king with his own preference for Skúli—but not without hoping that God will eventually change his mind and view things as Snorri does.

Rolf Stavnem’s contribution, “Creating Tradition: The Use of Skaldic Verse in Old Norse Historiography,” has affinities with the two preceding articles: he investigates the relationship of verse and prose in the prosimetrical saga form, the dynamic of “new-old” skaldic poetry, and the historiographical use of poetry to express ideals of

kingship. He takes up two particular examples from the sagas of King Óláfr Tryggvason for close examination: the poetry of the eleventh-century skald Skúli Þorsteinsson and that of Hallar-Steinn, who was active around the turn of the thirteenth century. Stavnem subjects the two poets' accounts of the Battle of Svǫldr—where Óláfr suffered his final defeat—to the same pattern of analysis and finds that the saga authors have used the verses in different ways. Skúli, a contemporary of Óláfr, claims to have been present at the battle. His poem is from the point of view of an old man looking back, and he can be regarded as an additional witness to what happened. What is remarkable here is that the details of his account do not square with the saga author's narrative—the verses seem to be included to present an alternative view. The saga author has accepted the earlier verses he has inherited, but feels no obligation to agree with what they say—he simply presents them for what they are. The treatment of Hallar-Steinn's verses is quite different. They are excerpted from a long *drápa*, *Reksteffja*, that has survived intact. It is an unabashedly Christian and hagiographical eulogy of Óláfr. The verses chosen by the saga author, however, do not reflect this, and Hallar-Steinn's Christian perspective would not be apparent to a reader not familiar with the *drápa*. *Reksteffja* is contemporary with the saga prose, but this is not apparent from the prosimetrical context. As in the examples discussed by Christopher Abram and Mikael Males, it is not clear whether the late-medieval saga reader was expected to advert to (or even care about) the age and original context of the poetry.

Rory McTurk and Hannah Burrows write about the poetry embedded in two Fornaldar Sögur (Sagas of Icelandic Prehistory). In “*Rattus rattus* as a Beast of Battle? Stanza 12 of *Ragnars saga*,” McTurk coincidentally offers the second contribution to this volume that deals with a troublesome Stanza 12 (see Kevin J. Wanner on *Háttatal* Stanza 12), in this case Stanza 12 of *Ragnars saga*.⁶⁴ Two manuscripts of this late-thirteenth-century saga about a legendary Viking-Age hero contain stanzas of poetry placed in the mouths of various characters in the narrative. Of the forty stanzas, three are in the *fornyrðislag* meter associated with eddic poetry, and thirty-seven are in what McTurk calls “a somewhat loose form of *dróttkvætt*.” These stanzas date from a time when the rigid definitions of meters recorded by Snorri Sturluson had fallen by the wayside. The stanzas consist of the standard eight lines, and the lines seem to aim at the required syllable count of six—though it is often not achieved. Some couplets are linked by alliteration, but rhyme is rare and haphazard. The construction of kennings is likewise flexible. This raises the question of whether the stanzas are corrupt and should be emended to make them conform to Snorri's rules. McTurk argues not, and he offers here a rationale for

editing and interpreting this particular stanza without emending the manuscript. His suggestion is unorthodox and ingenious, based on his extensive work on *Ragnars saga* over a long and distinguished career. Perhaps not all will agree with his reading of the stanza (though many are likely to find it convincing), but most importantly, it points the way to new approaches to this kind of poetry, where traditional methods have reached dead ends or even led scholars astray. His suggestion is valuable as a methodological example: how is an editor to approach a kenning that seems to fall outside the guidelines of the *Snorra Edda*?

Hannah Burrows takes up a topic from another thirteenth-century *fornaldarsaga*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, in “Wit and Wisdom: The Worldview of the Old Norse-Icelandic Riddles and Their Relationship to Eddic Poetry.” Given the long-standing interest in Old English and Medieval Latin riddles, it is surprising that so little scholarly attention has been directed toward the riddles from the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition. *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*⁶⁵ contains thirty seven riddles in eddic meters (*ljóðaháttir* and *fornyrðislag*), incorporated into the prose narrative as an exchange of wisdom between King Heiðrekr and the god Óðinn (disguised as a mysterious visitor named Gestumblindi). Burrows argues that the riddles come from a variety of backgrounds and were collected by the saga author (or redactor) who then wrote this episode for the express purpose of incorporating them into the narrative. The present article emerges from Burrows’s ongoing work on the riddles: her edition of them will appear in the forthcoming volume VIII (*Poetry in fornaldarsögur*) of *Skaldic Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. Like much of the poetry discussed in the present volume, the riddles resist categorization and classification. Burrows calls them “beyond eddic.” They are composed in “eddic” meters, but they also have enough affinity with skaldic poetry to have been included in Finnur Jónsson’s *Skjaldedigtning* and retained in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. Burrows shows how the thematic content of the riddles situates them both within and outside the eddic tradition, and her detailed study of the ordering of the riddles in relationship to one another offers clues to the intentions of the saga author who inserted them into his prosimetrical narrative. Those interested in the wider medieval tradition of riddling will welcome her discussion of how this Nordic manifestation fits into it.

The poetry of the *fornaldarsögur*, as Rory McTurk and Hannah Burrows show, begins to depart from the traditional formal ideals catalogued and enshrined by Snorri Sturluson. Whether this represents the degeneration—as it often has been regarded—or literary innovation and development is a matter of opinion. But the former view has led to the Icelandic poetry of the later Middle Ages—which

in Iceland extended into the seventeenth century—being understudied and unappreciated. Its affinities to the European literary culture of the time have made it uninteresting to scholars more concerned with the independent Nordic literary tradition of the preceding centuries, and comparativists whose work is based in other linguistic areas have often been unaware of it.

Martin Chase’s “Devotional Poetry at the End of the Middle Ages in Iceland” draws attention to the extensive body of Icelandic devotional poetry from the period preceding and immediately following the Reformation (officially 1550 in Iceland). This body of poetry has received little scholarly attention—much of it has never even been edited. Chase provides a survey of the extant texts and contextualizes them in a genre, that while having affinities with traditional skaldic poetry, the contemporary Icelandic *rímur*, and European (notably English) devotional poetry, has its own distinguishing characteristics. He makes a case for the literary merit of these poems and underlines the need for new editions and studies.

We see another point of contact with a European literary tradition in the Icelandic ballads. The Icelandic ballads are not known to have been written down until the middle of the seventeenth century, although their analogues in Denmark and England were recorded in manuscript a century before, and in print not long after. The dating of the Icelandic ballads is therefore quite uncertain. As a way of assessing the extent to which the ballads can be regarded as medieval, Paul Acker, in “Love and Death in the Icelandic Ballad,” looks at two ballads in light of the medieval antecedents on which they are based. The ballad *Gunnars kvæði*⁶⁶ has roots in *Njáls saga* and *Tristrams kvæði* in the *riddarasaga* (chivalric romance) *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*. Acker finds that *Gunnars kvæði* (like *Njáls saga*) is highly original, especially in its attitude towards women. *Tristrams kvæði*,⁶⁷ on the other hand, like *Tristrams saga* (a Norwegian translation of an Anglo-Norman poem), shows layers of accrued convention, from the chivalric tradition through common ballad motifs.

The final chapter, “Steinunn Finnsdóttir and her *rímur*,” by Shaun F. D. Hughes, brings us to the turn of the eighteenth century and the youngest texts dealt with in this collection. Hughes, one of the leading authorities on the Icelandic *rímur*, highlights here the earliest known Icelandic woman poet. He guides us through her *Snækóngs rímur*,⁶⁸ providing translations that make the poem more accessible. Steinunn is not an author who remains in the background. Her *mannsöngvar* or fitt introductions are highly self-conscious—and highly gendered. She repeatedly calls attention to her gender, often by using a feigned modesty topos, though she occasionally breaks out of this pose and demands more respect from men. She likewise calls attention to the

gender of her audience, whom she imagines to be women and children. Hughes shows how her poetic diction—for example her kennings for poetry—reflect her female authorial voice. He observes that the poem “shows an awareness of the marginalization of women’s creativity and makes a call for something to be done about it,” and suggests that “it may well be that further stanzas on this and similar topics lie buried in the mass of unpublished (and undervalued) material from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.” Equally interesting is the thematic content of *Snækóngs rímur*, where the characters are led through such a complex series of gender changes that, as Hughes says, “the category of gender becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.”

This volume emerged from a series of conferences sponsored by the Center for Medieval Studies at Fordham University. The first was a large interdisciplinary conference on “New Directions in Medieval Scandinavian Studies” held in 2010, with the aim of exploring the ways in which traditional interpretations of medieval Scandinavian culture, literature, history, and religion are being challenged or advanced by new methodologies and new questions. A number of presentations dealt with Old Norse-Icelandic poetry and took up such questions as the dating of vernacular texts, periodization, orality and literacy, and methods of editing. One of the results of the conference was that Rolf Stavnem came to Fordham the following year as a visiting fellow, when he and Martin Chase took advantage of the occasion and organized a spin-off meeting, a symposium that focused specifically on skaldic poetry. Then in 2012 Mikael Males spent a term at Fordham and organized a symposium on “Textual Interpretation in Medieval Vernaculars.”

The articles that follow all have their roots in the first two meetings. Many of the contributors (Hannah Burrows, Martin Chase, Rory McTurk, Russell Poole, and Rolf Stavnem) are contributing editors to the massive ongoing *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* project,⁶⁹ and their articles here are related to their re-examination of texts for this new edition. The essays in this volume, like the re-editing work of the Skaldic poetry project, represent an impetus to view, to categorize, and to assess this ancient poetry in new ways. The questions raised here and the approaches illustrated will contribute to a continuing discussion of Old Norse-Icelandic northern poetry, one that will allow its strengths to be more widely appreciated.

THE SOURCES OF *MERLÍNÚSSPÁ*: GUNNLAUGR LEIFSSON'S USE OF TEXTS ADDITIONAL TO THE *DE GESTIS BRITONUM* OF GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH

Russell Poole

Gunnlaugr Leifsson's *Merlínússpá* (*Prophecy of Merlin*) consists for the most part of a rendering of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini* (*Prophecies of Merlin*) into the Icelandic. The translator (d. 1218/19) was a Benedictine monk at Þingeyrar and a member of the notable school of historiographic writers at that house.¹ He is thought to have composed and published *Merlínússpá* around the turn of the thirteenth century.² The *Prophetiae* cover aspects of British history and legend starting with the wars between the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons (Prophecies 1 to 8), continuing with the Norman Conquest and the Plantagenet kings (9 to 12), and finally projecting onward to events that lay in the future from Geoffrey's viewpoint so as to conclude with the end of the world (13 to 74).³ The last historically identifiable event narrated is the drowning of Henry I's heirs in the year 1120.⁴ Geoffrey composed and circulated his *Prophetiae* in the shape of the *Libellus Merlini* prior to his completion of *De gestis Britonum*⁵ and subsequently incorporated them into the longer work, which he published not long before the death of Henry I on 1 December 1135.⁶ Within this narrative frame the utterances of Merlinus Ambrosius are prompted by the attempts of Vortigernus, king of the Britons, to build a fortification against the Saxons. The text-within-a-text constituted by the *Prophetiae* occupies *De gestis Britonum* VII chapters 3 and 4 in the Griscom edition,⁷ corresponding to chapters 111–17 of Faral's edition⁸ and of Reeve and Wright's edition.⁹

The present essay reviews the evidence brought forward by J. S. Eysteinnsson to show that Gunnlaugr must have gone beyond the text of the *Prophetiae* incorporated in *De gestis Britonum* and drawn directly on the historical narration in Books IX to XI of *De gestis Britonum*.¹⁰ It will also consider Gunnlaugr's possible use, direct or indirect, of additional historical or quasi-historical sources: Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, and William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*. Left aside here is the question of Gunnlaugr's source or sources for the apologia for prophecy and the homiletic peroration concluding Parts I and II of his poem, respectively.

Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* enjoyed prominence from the outset, not least in virtue of the eminence of their dedicatee, Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, who no doubt commissioned the work. Henry of Huntingdon records that Alexander was known by contemporaries as "the Magnificent" because of his lavishness and luxury, behavior that called down on him strictures from Bernard of Clairvaux.¹¹ Contemporary writers praised the bishop's munificence and wisdom in equal measure. He appears to have been responsible for building works at no fewer than three episcopal castles.¹² He was also well known as a patron of learning. As archdeacon he is said to have personally compiled an Anglo-Norman glossary of English legal terms¹³ and as bishop he commissioned Henry, archdeacon of Huntingdon, to write his *Historia Anglorum*.¹⁴ He is praised as a poet and scholar in Geoffrey's separate prologue to the *Prophetiae*:

... Compellebant me undique contemporanei mei prophetias ipsius edere, maxime autem Alexander Lincolniensis episcopus, uir summae religionis et prudentiae. Non erat alter in clero siue in populo cui tot nobiles famularentur, quos mansueta pietas ipsius et benigna largitas in obsequium suum alliciebat.... Admodum autem ammiror quia id pauperi stilo dignatus eras committere, cum tot doctiores uirga potestatis tuae coherceat, qui sublimioris carminis delectamento aures mineruae tuae mulcerent. Et ut omnes philosophos totius Britanniae insulae preteream, tu solus es, quod non erubesco fateri, qui prae cunctis audaci lira caneres nisi te culmen honoris ad cetera negocia uocaret. Quoniam ergo placuit ut Gaufridus Monemutensis fistulam suam in hoc uaticinio sonaret, modulationibus suis fauere non diffugas et, siquid inordinate siue uitiose protulerit ferula camenarum tuarum in rectum aduertas concentum.¹⁵

I was being pressed to publish his prophecies by all my contemporaries, and particularly by Alexander bishop of Lincoln, a man of the greatest piety and wisdom. No one among the clergy or the people enjoyed the service of so many nobles, whom he bound to him with his gentle goodness and kind generosity.... I am surprised that you deigned to entrust this task to my poor pen when your staff of office can command so many men of greater learning to soothe the ears of your intellect with the sweetness of a more sublime song. And to say nothing of all the scholars in the whole of Britain, I readily admit that you alone could sing it best of all with your bold lyre, if your lofty office did not call you to other business. Since it is your wish, therefore, that the reed of Geoffrey of Monmouth pipes this prophecy, please favour his playing and with the rod of your muses restore to harmony anything irregular or

Alexander's position of apparent strength notwithstanding, it is likely that his sudden request for a translation of Merlin's prophecies was actuated by the prevailing acute national instability and personal danger rather than sheer antiquarian curiosity.¹⁷ Interpretations of the prophecies later in the century also have an apparent basis in the most pressing contemporary concerns. A prime topic was the crisis between Henry II and St. Thomas Becket, whose cult developed immediately after his murder on 29 December 1170 and spread across Europe; his official canonization at the hands of Pope Alexander III occurred as early as 1173.¹⁸ In the Commentary to the *Prophetiae Merlini* contained in Ms. Cotton Claudius B VII (s. xiii),¹⁹ the prophecies about the progeny of the lion of justice are taken as referring to the banishment and eventual killing of Thomas:

8. Evigilabunt rugientes catuli, id est Henricus filius Imperatricis et filii eius sunt catuli leonis iustitiae, ad cuius rugitum Gallicanae turres tremebunt et ideo dicuntur rugientes catuli ... 9. infra moenia civitatum venabuntur: in venatu enim tria debent notari, scilicet fugatio, captio et interfectio; unde ipse rex Henricus et filius eius Henricus in caput civitatum venati sunt, id est in sanctum Thomam archiepiscopum, quia fugaverunt eum de civitate in civitatem, de regno in regnum et tandem ceperunt eum et interfecerunt.²⁰

8. The growling kittens awake: that is to say, Henry son of the Empress and his sons are the kittens of the lion of justice, at whose growl the towers of Gaul will tremble and hence they are called the growling kittens ... 9. They will hunt within the walls of the cities: for in the hunt three things should be noted, namely the flight, the capture, and the kill; hence the same king Henry and his son Henry went hunting the head of the cities, that is the holy Archbishop Thomas, in that they put him to flight from one city to another, from one kingdom to another, and eventually captured and killed him.²¹

About the prehistory of Gunnlaugr's project there is a great deal of uncertainty. We do not know precisely how or when the *Prophetiae* came to people's attention in Iceland, although there may have been a Lincoln connection.²² What can be said is that our Icelandic instantiation of the *Prophetiae* evidently came into being at a time of contestation of power between chieftains and church as intense (making all allowances for scale) as that witnessed in England.²³ It was a period when, in the words of Gabriel Turville-Petre, many

Icelanders, especially in the northern diocese, were giving way to extravagance and fanaticism in their religious beliefs.²⁴ A leading element in this ethos was Gunnlaugr's contemporary Guðmundr Arason, celebrity priest and later embattled bishop of Hólar (1203–37). Symptomatic of the ethos is the evident popularity of St. Ambrose and St. Thomas Becket as leading prelates who challenged secular authority. To summarize the key pieces of evidence on this score, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson (ca. 1166–1213) is said to have made a vow to Thomas in fulfillment of which he visited his shrine at Canterbury. The priest Tómas of Selárdalur, one of the first Icelanders to bear the name, was a kinsman of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson.²⁵ The first translation of *Thomas saga erkibyskups* is thought to have been made by the priest Bergr Gunnsteinsson (ca. 1160–1230), who would have been active during the episcopates of Þorlákr Þórhallsson and Guðmundr Arason and appears to have had connections with the latter.²⁶ A poem about Thomas Becket was composed by Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskald in the first half of the thirteenth century.²⁷

As to St. Ambrose, in an interesting piece of timing his feast-day was adopted as a Holy Day of Obligation in 1179.²⁸ Ambrose's fraught relations with secular authority might account for the interest in him on the part of Þorlákr, who is credited with an attempt to reform the Icelandic church. Guðmundr, likewise an activist for church rights, is said to have been especially devoted to this saint.²⁹ A single church is dedicated to Ambrose, at Höfði, where Guðmundr officiated for a time as priest.³⁰ On this basis Ambrose's life has been assessed as having derived its central significance for Icelanders from the battle for the liberty of the church waged by Þorlákr and Guðmundr.³¹ Manuscript fragments from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries represent two versions of *Ambrósíus saga*. Gunnlaugr is said to have written a rhymed office of St. Ambrose and recent research indicates that the extant Old Norse translation of *Vita sancti Ambrosii*, *Ambrósíus saga*, may also be Gunnlaugr's work.³²

Given these circumstances, then, it seems probable that the text of the *Prophetiae* was brought to Iceland by somebody who realized the potential impact of this work as a predominantly grim diorama of the secular leadership down the ages that could be used as a weapon in current controversies about the primacy of ecclesiastical versus secular authority. A crucial prompt to initiating a project to render the work into Icelandic, perhaps extending to an actual commission, is likely to have been stemmed from Guðmundr Arason. Aside from the broad political topicality, some significant pastoral preoccupations of his coincided with elements of the subject matter of the *Prophetiae*.³³

Codicologically speaking, the unique attestation of *Merlínússpá* occurs within the Hauksbók redaction of *Breta sǫgur*, the appropriately named Icelandic prose translation of the *De gestis Britonum*, and is placed in a context corresponding to that of the prophecies in *De gestis Britonum*. It has also long been recognized that Gunnlaugr must have had some knowledge of the contents of certain parts of *De gestis Britonum* outside the *Prophetiae Merlini*, Books V and VI in particular (with their account of Vortigernus and Merlinus) but also Books IX–XI (which deal with King Arthur and his successors).³⁴ The relationship between the translation projects that resulted in *Merlínússpá* and *Breta sǫgur* remains uncertain, however. In its extant shape, *Breta sǫgur* is a much altered version of the original translation and offers no clear indications as to the identity of the translator.³⁵ Fredrik Paasche considered that *De gestis Britonum* had not been translated at the point that Gunnlaugr composed his poem;³⁶ J. S. Eysteinnsson,³⁷ followed by Würth,³⁸ thinks it likely that *De gestis Britonum* was translated in the early thirteenth century at Þingeyrar, possibly by Gunnlaugr himself. Internal evidence shows *Merlínússpá* to have originally been free-standing from *Breta sǫgur*, insofar as it explains the circumstances and personalities in a way that would be unnecessary for a reader who was following the narrative in *Breta sǫgur*. Also, as I have noted previously, strong political motivations would have existed for the elaboration of a poem devoted to prophecy, even if the detailed subject matter might have been arcane for Icelanders, and an exercise in the vaticinatory genre would not in itself have seemed at all strange to an Icelandic audience. We might for those reasons dissent from Turville-Petre's skepticism that Gunnlaugr's translation of the *Prophetiae Merlini* could have survived in isolation from a translation of *De gestis Britonum*.³⁹

Among the more significant and telling indications of Gunnlaugr's knowledge of *De gestis Britonum* beyond Book VI is the recognition of Arthur's key role amongst British kings communicated by the parenthetic remark “sá es vegligastr” (he is the most glorious), in I 24 line 3.⁴⁰ This must stem from *De gestis Britonum* IX–XI, perhaps especially from Geoffrey's description of the splendors of Arthur's court in Book IX,⁴¹ and not from the *Prophetiae Merlini* in isolation,⁴² since *De gestis Britonum* VI says merely: “aper etenim Cornubiae succursum praestabit et colla eorum sub pedibus suis conculcabit”⁴³ (the boar of Cornwall will lend his aid and trample the foreigners' necks beneath his feet).⁴⁴

Gunnlaugr's reporting of the detail of Arthur's conquests can also be accounted for as deriving from *De gestis Britonum* IX:⁴⁵

Fersk undir hann
foldu grœnni

ok eyja fjölrð
í úthafi,
Íra ok Engla
ok Út-Skota,
víðum löndum
valskra þjóða,
Nóregs síðu
ok Norðr-Dana.⁴⁶

Under him is brought the green land and a multitude of islands in the outer ocean—of the Irish and the English and the outlying Scots—extensive territories of the French people, the coast of Norway and of the northern Danes.

By contrast, *De gestis Britonum* VI lacks specificity: “insule oceani potestati ipsius subdentur, et Gallicanos saltus possidebit”⁴⁷ (the islands of the ocean will fall under his sway and he will occupy the glades of France).⁴⁸ As noted by J. S. Eysteinnsson, Gunnlaugr appears to draw on a wider knowledge of legends of Arthur’s conquests than this sentence would supply, taken on its own, and this Icelander’s coverage not unnaturally extends to the North Atlantic and Scandinavian regions.⁴⁹

Gunnlaugr’s account of the final disappearance of Arthur may also be significant in this respect:

Ok Rúmverjar
ræsi ugga;
megut reisa þeir
rönd við stilli.
Mart veitk annat
of menbrota,
en ógloft sék
örlof konungs.⁵⁰

The Romans too fear the king, they cannot raise a shield against the lord. I know much else about the breaker of rings, but the fate of the king I see indistinctly.

If we compare *De gestis Britonum* VI: “tremebit Romulea domus saeuicium ipsius, et exitus eius dubius erit”⁵¹ (the house of Rome will tremble before his rage, and his end shall be unknown),⁵² we see that Gunnlaugr adds to this the claim to know much more about Arthur than he is telling now. The obvious source of this extra information would be *De gestis Britonum* IX–XI.⁵³

In reckoning with an increase in territorial sway on the part of

Arthur's successors, Gunnlaugr may once again be drawing on *De gestis Britonum* XI:⁵⁴

Ok áttungar
ins ítra grams
laða at lofðungi
landi ok þegnum.⁵⁵

And the descendants of the illustrious king attract land and subjects to the king.

By contrast *De gestis Britonum* VI makes no claims for expansion: “sex posterius eius sequentur sceptrum”⁵⁶ (his six successors will wield the scepter).⁵⁷

Gunnlaugr also includes the idea that despite the breakdown of religion the English will in due course be baptized:

Verðr kristnibrot
of kyni þjóðar,
þó munu sjálfir
síðar nøkkvi
enskir lýðir
allir skírask.⁵⁸

There is a breakdown of Christianity among the kindred of the people, though the English people will themselves all be baptized somewhat later.

By contrast, *De gestis Britonum* VI has simply: “delebitur iterum religio”⁵⁹ (religion will be destroyed again).⁶⁰ The conversion of the English is foreshadowed in *De gestis Britonum* XI⁶¹ and fully narrated by Bede⁶² and Henry of Huntingdon.⁶³ We shall return presently to the possibility that Gunnlaugr might have used these latter sources directly.

Against these reasonably clear cases where Gunnlaugr has extra material that is likely to have originated in *De gestis Britonum* IX–XI, a few of J. S. Eysteinnsson's cases are inconclusive and one should definitely be discounted because in fact the relevant motifs do appear in the *Prophetiae*:

Þá mun inn hvíti
hjarlþvengr fara
snót saxneska
snarráðr laða,
ok með miklum

mannfjölða kemr
fjarðbyggs Skoꝓul
fold at byggja.⁶⁴

Then the white thong of the earth [SNAKE] will travel, with swift resolution, to invite the Saxon woman, and the valkyrie of the fjord-barley [LADY] comes with a great multitude of men to settle the land.

Gunnlaugr's adaptation here is closely reliant on *De gestis Britonum* VI: "exurget iterum albus draco et filiam Germaniae inuitabit"⁶⁵ (the white dragon will rise again and summon Germany's daughter).⁶⁶ J. S. Eysteinnsson was misled by the absence of this sentence from the First Variant Version of *De gestis Britonum*⁶⁷ into supposing that Gunnlaugr could only have derived the motif of the Saxon woman from *De gestis Britonum* XI.⁶⁸

RELATION OF MERLÍNÚSSPÁ TO VITA MERLINI

I turn now to the second of our candidate sources for Gunnlaugr, the *Vita Merlini*, a life of Merlinus Caledonius that was composed by Geoffrey a decade or so after the composition of *Libellus Merlini*⁶⁹ and dedicated about 1149 to the diocesan of Oxford, Bishop Robert de Chesney of Lincoln (d. 1166).⁷⁰ The significance of Robert's receiving this dedication from Geoffrey, who until recently had been Chesney's fellow canon at St George's-in-the-Castle, at Oxford, is unclear,⁷¹ but Geoffrey's elevation to the episcopate, the culminating point of his career, followed soon after.⁷² In his exordium Geoffrey praises Robert's learning:

Tu corrige carmen,
gloria pontificum calamos moderando Roberte.
Scimus enim quia te perfudit nectare sacro
Philosophia suo fecitque per omnia doctum
ut documenta dares dux et preceptor in orbe.

Correct my poem, Robert, glory of the bishops, by guiding my pen; for we know that Philosophy has filled you with its holy nectar and made you universally learned, so that you might prove yourself the leading teacher in the world.⁷³

In striking contrast to *De gestis Britonum*, evidence for wide dissemination of *Vita Merlini* is sparse to non-existent. Only two independent texts are extant. Tolstoy has proposed that "the most likely explanation is that Bishop Robert decided in dangerous times to

keep *Vita Merlini* to himself and a handful of select intimates, afterwards suppressing it altogether when the civil war was resolved in 1153.”⁷⁴ While it was also known to the chronicler Ranulf Higden (d. 1364), a Benedictine monk at the abbey of St. Werburgh, Chester,⁷⁵ who incorporated material from it in his universal history the *Polichronicon*,⁷⁶ that in itself does not necessarily imply more extensive circulation: the book’s availability in Chester can be explained as arising through the Lincoln connections of the Earls of Chester, of whom Ranulf, to judge from his given name (one current in the family of the Earls), may have been a dependent. It is therefore somewhat surprising—and perhaps an additional hint of a Lincoln connection—that Gunnlaugr either knew the *Vita Merlini* directly or at the least knew a version of the *Prophetiae* that had taken up a salient trait from the *Vita Merlini*—namely, that Merlinus Ambrosius, like Merlinus Caledonius, is both a prophet and a king:

Ergo peragratīs sub multis regibus annis
Clarūs habebatur Merlinus in orbe britannus.
Rex erat et uates, Demetarumque superbis
Iura dabat populis, ducibusque futura canebat.

Now, after many years and many kings had come and gone, Merlin the Briton was famous throughout the world. He was king and prophet, gave laws to the proud people of the South Welsh [people of Dyfed], and foretold the future to their leaders.⁷⁷

Corresponding to *rex* in Gunnlaugr’s stanza is the poetic *heiti jofurr*:

Ljós mun lýðum
ljóðbók vera,
þó es í frœði
flest at ráða,
þats fyrir jofurr
öldum sagði
brezkri þjóðu;
nú skal brag kveða.⁷⁸

The song-book will be clear to men, although most of its lore calls for interpretation, which centuries ago the leader [Merlínús] told the British people; now shall the poem be recited.

Merlínús, even if “noble,” could hardly have been referred to as *jofurr* had Gunnlaugr not known of the other Merlin’s designation as a king in the *Vita Merlini*. This trait seems to underwrite a characterization of Merlínús throughout Gunnlaugr’s adaptation that

goes far beyond *De gestis Britonum*. Through his choice of kennings and *heiti*, he seems to aggrandize Merlin's social status and function in a systematic fashion, putting him side by side with Vortigernus:

Einn vas maðr sá,
es myrkva frétt
fyr skata skýrum
skynja kunni.
Hét yngva vinr
Ambrósiús,
en inn ágæti
oðru nafni
Merlínús sá
maðr kallaðisk.⁷⁹

That man was [the] only [one] who could explain the obscure portent to the wise king. The king's friend was called Ambrósiús but that excellent man was known by another name, Merlínús.

The circumlocution “vinr Yngva,” “the king's friend” is conspicuously discrepant from the account in *De gestis Britonum*. J. S. Eysteinnsson argues that such phrases are conventional in nature (meaning “lord” or similar), comparing I 10/2, I 11/8, I 20/1, I 42/7, I 93/4, and I 94/11,⁸⁰ and this is true to some extent. Nevertheless the stanza differs significantly from *De gestis Britonum*, where Merlin is presented as of obscure origins and without previous close connections to royalty. Similar points emerge from another stanza:

Þat kvað valda
verdags hǫtuðr,
at þar undir vas
ólítit vatn.
Bauð grund grafa
gumna stjóri,
reynisk spaklig
spámanns saga.⁸¹

The hater of the day of the sea [GOLD > MUNIFICENT PATRON] said the cause was that a large lake lay underneath. The ruler of men ordered the ground be dug up; the prophet's account turns out to be percipient.

Here once more Merlínús is presented as a man of substance, indeed a magnate, who is in a position to bestow gold, and in meaningful complementation to the king, who bases his commands

upon Merlínús's predictions. Especially striking is Gunnlaugr's use of the kenning *folkstafr* (people-stave [LEADER]) in reference to Merlínús.⁸² Rudolf Meissner notes that most kennings denoting priest or member of the clergy relate to prelates of the highest status, in particular bishops. Given that bishops are also powerful magnates they are naturally referred to by kennings that denote leadership or governance of peoples or territories: examples are *lands hofðingi* (significantly—if tendentiously—referring to Bishop Guðmundr Arason), *bragna stýrir*, *hólða stýrir*, and *fyrða gætir* (respectively, prince of the land, governor of men, governor of warriors, and guardian of men). *Folkstafr*, in reference to Merlínús, aligns well with these. Upper clergy can also be designated in terms of friendship, examples being *lýða vinr*, *skatna vinr*, and *ýta ástvinr* (respectively, friend of the people, friend of warriors, and loving friend of men). With these compare *Yngva vinr*, in reference to Merlínús.⁸³ In another type of kenning Guðmundr Arason is designated *skóla krapti* (pillar, support of the school): this base-word is from the same semantic field as *stafr* in Gunnlaugr's *folkstafr*.⁸⁴ In selecting designations for Merlínús, then, Gunnlaugr might have glanced at the contemporary bishop, or even prince bishop, possessed of wealth, military resources, and a responsibility for and command over his people.

RELATION OF MERLÍNÚSSPÁ TO HENRY OF HUNTINGDON'S *HISTORIA ANGLORUM* AND WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY'S *GESTA REGUM ANGLORUM*

Discussion here centers on a well-known passage of the *Historia Anglorum* where Henry of Huntingdon blames the Archbishop of Canterbury, William de Corbeil (d. 1136), for giving King Henry I an opportunity to make money out of dispensations for priests to marry. He sharply criticizes the king's licensing of clerics to keep concubines: "verum rex decepit eos simplicitate Willielmi archiepiscopi. Concesserunt namque regi justiciam de uxoribus sacerdotum ... Accepit enim rex pecuniam infinitam de presbiteris, et redemit eos" (but the king deceived them through Archbishop William's simplicity. They granted the king jurisdiction on the matter of priests' wives.... The king took vast sums of money from the priests, and released them).⁸⁵ These strictures from Henry of Huntingdon no doubt reflect the agenda of Bishop Alexander, who attended the legatine councils in 1127 and 1129 convened by William where these and other questions were debated.⁸⁶ The council of 1125 had prohibited the presence of any women in clergy's households unless they were relatives and in 1127 followed this up by enacting canons declaring that clergy who refused to give up their wives or concubines would be deprived of their benefices and that any such women who did not leave the parish voluntarily could be expelled and even forced into slavery. In 1129

came further admonitions to the clergy to live a celibate life and put aside their women. But then, as we have seen, King Henry, presiding over the council, undermined the prohibition. Geoffrey's account in *De gestis Britonum* VI, though not without an eye to the king's zeal for taxation, seems to glide past this controversy so as to single out other types of abuses:

In diebus eius aurum ex lilio et urtica extorquebitur et argentum ex ungulis mugientium manabit. Calamistrati uaria uellera uestibunt, et exterior habitus interiora signabit.⁸⁷

In his time gold will be extracted from the lily and the nettle, and silver shall drip from the hooves of lowing cattle. Men with curled hair will wear fleeces of varied hue, and their outer apparel will betray their inner selves.⁸⁸

Gunnlaugr by contrast attributes such excesses of attire and appearance exclusively to women and adds the notion that no (successful?) reform of morals would take place where women were concerned:

Þá mun gull snarat
af grasi mǫrgu;
flýtr ór klaufum
kalfs ættar silfr.
Eru fagrbúin
fljóð í landi;
verðrat snótum
siðbót at því.⁸⁹

Then gold will be twisted from many an herb; silver flows from the hooves of the calf's kindred. There are finely dressed women in the land; there will not be moral reform for the ladies on account of that.

Here Gunnlaugr is pretty clearly writing under the influence of Henry of Huntingdon's account of the attempted (and failed) moral reforms. In two further cases Gunnlaugr might again be indebted to Henry of Huntingdon but a second possible source is William of Malmesbury, whose *Gesta regum Anglorum* was published in 1125 and then re-published in a revised version in 1127. The first of the stanzas that bear on this question read as follows:

Ríkir enn at þat
ormar tvennir;

missir annarr þar
aldrs fyr skeyti.
En annarr mun
aptr of hverfa
und skugga nafns,
at sköpum vinna.⁹⁰

With that two snakes are ruling once more; one loses his life there to an arrow. But the other will turn back under the cover of a name: it will contend against the fates.

This prophecy appears to allude to two of the sons of William the Conqueror, William Rufus, who succeeded his father as king of England in 1087, and Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy, who initially competed with William Rufus for the throne. With Gunnlaugr's stanza we can compare a series of passages in *De gestis Britonum* VI. The main source for the first *helmingr* is evidently "Succedent duo dracones, quorum alter inuidiae spiculo suffocabitur"⁹¹ (Two dragons will succeed, one of which will be suffocated by the arrow of envy).⁹² A salient difference between Gunnlaugr and Geoffrey here is that the former uses the word for *skeyti* (arrow) literally: the figurative usage and the element of *invidia* (envy) are absent. The motif of a mortal wound from a literal arrow fits well with the manner of death of William Rufus chronicled by either Henry of Huntingdon ("Ubi Walterus Tirel cum sagitta ceruo intendens regem percussit inscius" [There Walter Tirel, aiming at a stag, accidentally hit the king with an arrow])⁹³ or William of Malmesbury ("sagitta pectus ... traiectus," [pierced ... by an arrow in the breast])⁹⁴ and is no doubt dependent on one or other of them.

The main source for Gunnlaugr's second *helmingr* is evidently *De gestis Britonum* VI: "alter uero sub umbra nominis redibit"⁹⁵ (while the other will return beneath the shadow of a name).⁹⁶ Discrepant, however, is the line "at sköpum vinna" (contend against the fates). This element in the characterization of Robert Curthose appears to be derived not from *De gestis Britonum* but from the account in William of Malmesbury: "sed nullo impetrato ad bellum publicum uenit, ultimam fortunam experturus. Qua illum infelici pede prosequente ..." (he was reduced to overt war, to try a last throw with Fortune. But she pursued him with hostile intent ...).⁹⁷ Henry of Huntingdon's mention, s. a. 1106, of divine determination to thwart Robert's wishes and efforts⁹⁸ is a less probable cue for Gunnlaugr's account in terms of verbal and motivic parallels.

The second stanza in contention is as follows:

Sprett es í miðju

mótpenningum;
mun gǫrst gleðu
glatask ránsemi;
tennr munu gylðis
trausti numnar,
ok leo-varga
verða at fiskum
hvassir hvelpar
hvaltúnum í.⁹⁹

There is a split in the middle of minted pennies; the kite's thieving ways will completely come to a stop, the wolf's teeth will be deprived of their strength, and the fierce cubs of the lion-wolves will become fish in the whale-enclosures [SEA].

With this we can compare the account in *De gestis Britonum* 113:

Findetur forma commercii; dimidium rotundum erit. Peribit miluorum rapacitas, et dentes luporum hebetabuntur. Catuli leonis in aequoreos pisces transformabuntur, et aquila eius super montem Arauium nidificabit.¹⁰⁰

The shape for trading will be cut: the half will be circular. The greed of kites will be ended, and the teeth of wolves blunted. The lion's cubs will become fishes of the sea, and his eagle will nest on mount Aravius.¹⁰¹

In this prophecy the drowning of Henry's children in the disaster of the White Ship in 1120 is referred to in allegorical terms, as a metamorphosis of the lion's cubs into fish. Gunnlaugr, while retaining the allegory, appears to bundle these *catuli leonis* in with the evil forces (allegorized as the kite and the wolf) that the Beast of Justice (Henry I) has purportedly checked, a shift from Geoffrey's version of the story that might reflect influence from the chroniclers' condemnations of the drowned complement as variously sodomites (Henry of Huntingdon)¹⁰² or imprudent abusers of alcohol (William of Malmesbury).¹⁰³

I conclude with two examples where Gunnlaugr might have his information either direct from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* or else from a source such as Henry or William who used Bede.

Jorð vas forðum
fýrr kend Bretum,
sús Englum es
eignuð síðan;

þvíat in enska þjóð
áðan vélti
breks ósama
brezka lýði.¹⁰⁴

The land, which subsequently is assigned to the English, had previously belonged to the Britons in days of yore, for the English people beforehand deceived the British people [who were] not given to rapaciousness [with land]

Es áttbogi
enskrar þjóðar
saxneskr sagaðr
í sǫgum fornum.
Þaðan eflðusk þeir
til þrimu geira,
landi at ræna
lofðung Breta.¹⁰⁵

The lineage of the English people is said in ancient stories to be Saxon. From there they reinforced themselves for tumult of spears, to deprive the king of the Britons of the land.

The notions of deception and reinforcements in these two stanzas derive not from *De gestis Britonum* but from the tradition, conveyed by Bede, that when Vortigern invited a select corps of Saxons to protect his kingdom they seized the opportunity, despite oaths to the contrary, to conquer the country.¹⁰⁶ Henry of Huntingdon has a similar account, largely quoting Bede.¹⁰⁷

En hers jaðarr
halda máttit
brezkri jǫrðu
né bauga fjǫlð.
Alt fór inn heiðni
herr it eystra
eldi ok jarni
eylands jarðar.¹⁰⁸

And the leader of the army could not hold the British land or the mass of treasures. The heathen army overran all the eastern [part] of the territory of the island with fire and iron.

This stanza possibly represents an inference from one or both of the following in *De gestis Britonum* 105: “Vortegirrus ... duci eorum

Hengisto dedit agros plurimos in Lindisea regione”¹⁰⁹ (Vortigern ... gave their leader Hengest extensive lands in the region of Lindsey),¹¹⁰ or “[Saxones] urbem Lundoniae primitus adeuntes ceperunt. Ceperunt deinde Eboracum et Lindocolinum nec non et Guintoniam, quasque prouincias deuastantes”¹¹¹ ([The Saxons] went first to London, which they took. Next they took York, Lincoln and Winchester and laid waste to all regions).¹¹² With the possible exception of Winchester, all the localities named can be regarded as lying on the eastern side of Britain. But it is likelier that Gunnlaugr drew on sources in which the notion of “eastern” is explicit, as in the account by Bede: “in orientali parte insulae” (in the eastern part of the island),¹¹³ which is quoted by Henry of Huntingdon.¹¹⁴

CONCLUSIONS

How could Gunnlaugr have gained information from the *De gestis Britonum*, the *Historia ecclesiastica*, the *Vita Merlini*, the *Historia Anglorum*, and the *Gesta regum Anglorum*? It seems reasonable to suppose that of these works at least the *Historia ecclesiastica* and *De gestis Britonum* were already available in Iceland at his time for him to consult. Equally, Gunnlaugr may have had independent access to the *Vita Merlini*, the *Historia Anglorum*, and the *Gesta regum Anglorum* for the snippets of information that he uses. We can point to parallels for this comparative swiftness and precision of uptake in twelfth-century Denmark.¹¹⁵ Michael Gelting has, for example, shown that the author of the *Chronicle of Roskilde* (dated to 1138) almost certainly made use of Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum* a few years after its 1133 publication.¹¹⁶

An alternative scenario, however, is that Gunnlaugr resorted to a version of the *Prophetiae Merlini* that included a commentary with annotations and excerpts taken from such authorities. These prophecies, with their teasingly enigmatic animal allegory, invited both glosses and more formal running commentaries, whose existence has been noted previously.¹¹⁷ By the end of the twelfth century medieval schoolmen had produced five systematic commentaries on this matter. Instances are Lincoln Cathedral Ms. A. 46 s.xii¹¹⁸ (not held at Lincoln as early as Gunnlaugr’s time, however) and Paris BNF Lat. 14465 s.xii, the latter of which adds the chapters that precede the *Prophetiae Merlini* in *De gestis Britonum* from 105.489 to the end of 108 so as to explain their historical background.¹¹⁹ Between 1174 and 1179 appeared the *Explanationes in prophetiam Merlini* usually though not universally attributed to Alan of Lille.¹²⁰ The first book of this commentary determines that Merlin was a Christian; the second concludes that God used Merlin to predict the future.¹²¹ Gunnlaugr

could have obtained some viewpoints and pieces of information from such a source, not least his staunch defense of the value of Merlin's prophecies at the conclusion of his Part I.

In the present state of our knowledge, then, we can say that Gunnlaugr had access to information in English sources additional to the prophecies per se. It is not at present possible, on the other hand, to determine his precise mode of access to these works, since it might have been direct from the authorities themselves or mediated via commentaries on the *Prophetiae Merlini*. Further research into the early commentaries might shed light on this question.

THE GENESIS OF *STRENGLEIKAR*: SCRIBES, TRANSLATORS, AND PLACE OF ORIGIN

Ingvil Brügger Budal

The majority of manuscripts known from thirteenth-century Norway contain administrative texts—laws and diplomas. However, the scarcity of fiction—sagas and poetry—in the manuscripts should not be interpreted as evidence of an absence of literary activity. Foreign fiction containing exotic elements dressed up in Norse language makes up a substantial part of the Norwegian contribution to the so-called “norrøne felleslitteratur,” the Old Norse literature originating in Norway and Iceland. Perhaps the most noteworthy literary activity connected to thirteenth-century Norway is the translation of a variety of Old French chivalric texts.

The assumed royal initiative for these is based on the mention of a King Hákon, referring to Hákon Hákonarson, king of Norway from 1217 till 1263, in some of these translated *riddarasögur*. Ever since the first scholarly editions of these texts were published in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it has been taken for granted that the translations were executed somewhere in Norway in the mid-thirteenth century. Consequently, parts of the research on the *riddarasögur* have dealt with how these translations came into being: How did the Old French manuscripts come to Norway? Where in Norway were they translated? Who translated them, and were there multiple translators? How did the translator(s) acquire the skills needed to produce translations of such high quality? All of these research issues are based on the assumption of domestic translations, postulated by a series of prominent nineteenth-century scholars and editors. However, a close re-examination of the texts and their histories suggests that these really may not be the right questions to ask.

AIM

In my research on the genesis of the *Strengleikar*, a collection of translated *riddarasögur*, I have examined the unity—or rather the heterogeneity—of these short stories from multiple angles: in relation to their Old French source texts and their manuscript traditions, as well as within the scanty Old Norse manuscript tradition. The

approach has thus been synchronic and diachronic, interlingual and intralingual. This examination of manuscript composition alongside linguistic and stylistic features indicates that the supposed (but never questioned) place of translation for this particular *riddarasaga* collection must be reconsidered.¹ Such a reexamination will affect the history of literary activity in Norway, particularly the genesis of the rest of the *riddarasögur*, and might witness to the presence in Norway of fiction known in Anglo-Norman England during the mid-thirteenth century, even without any surviving manuscript material.

After a short presentation of the manuscript material, the circumstances surrounding the translation project that produced the *Strengleikar* will be described. Next will follow a discussion of selected textual features of the *Strengleikar*, both within the collection itself and in comparison to the source texts, particularly variations in division within the text. Consideration of these features supports the hypothesis that the translations were executed in England.

MANUSCRIPT MATERIAL

The *Strengleikar* is a collection of twenty-one short stories and a prologue translated from Anglo-Norman *lais*. With one exception, the Norse stories are known from a single manuscript, Uppsala, DG 4–7 (henceforth named N), of Norwegian provenance and dated to approximately 1270. Commonly considered to be a faithful representation of the original translation, the *Strengleikar* in N is written by two scribes, each with his own individual paleographic and orthographic characteristics. Both scribes have closely rendered the linguistic variation present in their source texts. Through this linguistic variation, a number of earlier redactors or scribes emerge, made visible by dialectal features. However, there is no clear division of the texts according to these dialectal features, which seem to appear quite randomly. Does this reflect a larger group of translators working simultaneously in medieval Norway? Or are these redactors merely scribes copying a ready-made collection of texts?

The number and skills of the(se) translator(s) have been a matter of debate for Norse scholars since Keyser and Unger's introduction to the first edition of the *Strengleikar* in 1850. As we will see, the answers given have varied greatly: some scholars attribute the texts to a single, highly skilled translator, while others envision several translators with varying degrees of competence, each responsible for a smaller number of texts. Still, these are merely conjectures, and they do not originate from close readings and comparisons of the extant versions of the Old French source texts and the Norse translations.

Variants of the Old French source texts of the *Strengleikar* are found

in six manuscripts, dating from mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century, of both continental and insular origin. Their contents and the internal chronologies of the stories vary—none are identical to each other or to the Norse manuscript. It is commonly accepted that the mid thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman manuscript BL Harley 978, containing what is considered to be Marie de France’s collection of *lais*, is closest to N. Nonetheless, some of the Old Norse stories originate from the so-called anonymous *lais*, and four stories have no known Old French sources.²

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Initially the textual evidence will be left aside, and I will focus on the circumstances surrounding the translation project that produced the *Strengleikar*. Some of the *riddarasögur* refer to their commissioner, King Hákon: for example, the prologue to the *Strengleikar* announces that

“<E>N bok þessor er hinn virðulege hacon konongr let norrœna or volska male ma hæita líoða bok” (And the esteemed King Hákon let this book be translated [lit.: “be norsed”] from the French language and it should be called the book of songs).³ However, no more information regarding the act of translating, or the origins of the translations, is given in the Norse texts. It is likely that the king ordered the translations of a specific genre of texts, but equally unlikely that he had sufficient knowledge of Anglo-Norman/Old French contemporary literature to be able to commission the translations of named texts.

The abundance of Icelandic medieval manuscripts has no parallel in Norway, where it seems that a small, random selection of texts has survived more or less by chance. No Old French manuscripts survive in medieval Norway and Iceland, nor are there any references to them. The cost of manuscripts made their purchase a considerable investment, and if they were intended to be the source text for a translation their utility or purpose would have been extremely limited. Very few people in Norway would have been able to read, understand, or enjoy Old French texts, and there would have been little use for the manuscripts once the translations had been made—a rather poor use of the investment. The alternative would have been to ship these manuscripts abroad and put them up for sale in England or France.

The Norwegian scholar Anne Holtsmark dismissed the idea of the source manuscripts for the *riddarasögur* being purchased abroad and suggested that they were *manuscripts de jongleurs*, containing the repertoire of wandering minstrels, who both imported them and left Norway with them.⁴ Furthermore, Holtsmark was convinced that nobody in Norway possessed the skills required for translating these

texts without access to dictionaries, encyclopedias, or other linguistic aids. The translations' unquestioned quality, according to Holtsmark, can only be explained by translation as a cooperative work between a Norse translator or scribe and an Old French minstrel, thus reflecting not only the translator's mastering of Old French, but also his possibility of consulting a native French speaker when in doubt.

The very existence of such *manuscrits de jongleurs* is questioned by recent research, suggesting that Old French manuscripts like BNF, fr. 837 and BNF, fr. 1553 were book collections for the nobility rather than minstrels' repertoires.⁵ Moreover, there are no records of such minstrels ever having visited Norway, and Holtsmark's suggestion is therefore far from convincing. Regarding the Norwegians' language skills, Holtsmark is too pessimistic, as numerous members of the Norse clergy travelled and studied abroad and must have mastered a number of foreign languages.⁶

On the other hand, the most recent editors of the *Strengleikar*, Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane, were far more optimistic and envisioned a group of translators in Norway, each member translating up to three or four texts.⁷ Although this would explain the linguistic variation in N—and most likely place N as the first copy of the original translation—their hypothesis is problematic, and a close examination of it reveals some weaknesses. The *Strengleikar* count a total of twenty-two texts, and far from Holtsmark's severe doubts of finding even a single capable translator, Cook and Tveitane's hypothesis implies a group of at least five translators with excellent skills in Old French located in Norway in the mid-thirteenth century. The editors do not specifically suggest the physical form of the translators' sources, but it is implied that the individual translator worked with some kind of fascicule. This presupposes that someone brought between five and seven fascicules containing *lais* to Norway. If so, this would significantly increase the possibility for surviving manuscript fragments or references to these in older sources. The alternative to such fascicules is a group of translators sharing a manuscript and taking turns working with it. However, within the *lais* and the *Strengleikar*, there is what must be considered a core vocabulary. Examination reveals a remarkable one-to-one correspondence for this core vocabulary between the Old French and the Old Norse, and this stability is a clear indication that the translation originates from one individual and not several. Even though I find Holtsmark too pessimistic, Cook and Tveitane are too optimistic, and the existence of a group of such skilled translators in the same location is, in my opinion, highly improbable.

However, Cook and Tveitane do not dismiss Holtsmark's suggestion of the minstrels' manuscripts, and see this as likely as anything else.⁸

By combining their hypothesis of fascicules with Holtsmark's idea of minstrels' manuscripts, we can arrive at the possible scenario of minstrels bringing between five and seven fascicules of *lais* to Norway and to the king, who in turn found these stories so enchanting that he commissioned translations of them. The hypothesis is not without problems: the concept of such manuscripts could be a modern invention, and there are no records of Old French minstrels visiting Norway. If these minstrels did indeed have manuscripts of their repertoire, it is unclear whether we should imagine between five and seven groups of minstrels coming to Norway—or one group bringing between five and seven manuscripts—or anything in between. The straightforward argument against these groups of minstrels being in possession of even one manuscript, not to mention a collection, is their financial value.

Furthermore, if Cook and Tveitane are correct in proposing that the source texts for the *Strengleikar* were in the form of several fascicules, it is less likely that they were acquired and subsequently brought to Norway than that they were located in England, closely connected with either a monastery, a center of learning like a university, or a town with commercial book production. Two major problems in Cook and Tveitane's conjecture are the complete absence of any indication of manuscripts of this kind ever having been in Norway, and—as mentioned above and as emphasized by Holtsmark—the question of language skills. Both of these problems disappear, or more precisely are no longer relevant, if the translations were executed in England.

It must be considered unlikely that a translator or an emissary located and purchased several manuscripts containing tales of the *lais* genre. Nevertheless, a translator staying in England over a period of time would have access to a variety of manuscripts containing chivalric literature without purchasing them and would have the possibility of working with them in a local scriptorium, an environment where any linguistic or conceptual difficulties could easily be resolved.

The transmitted manuscripts containing Old French *lais* are known from three locations in England in the mid-thirteenth century. The first two of these locations are connected to the writing (or, rather, copying and gathering) of Harley 978, the Anglo-Norman manuscript bearing the closest resemblance to the Norse *Strengleikar*. This particular manuscript was quite likely located in Reading Abbey and Oxford between 1250 and 1265, at a time when foreign students were coming to Oxford and copying books for their own use and when the town was becoming a center for professional book production. Oxford attracted Nordic scholars—among the most prominent is Anders Sunesøn, later the Archbishop of Lund (1201–1224), who was a

student in Oxford during the 1180s. In such a center of learning, a foreign scholar or translator would have had easy access to a variety of manuscripts and book collections. Such a scenario in which one or several collections of books were at hand for the Norse translator of the *Strengleikar* offers a probable explanation for the divergence in content and chronology of the short narratives in N from their counterparts in the Old French manuscripts containing *lais*, including Harley 978. It is not unlikely that the translator made use of several manuscripts of varying content in his work, and if so, this would reinforce the hypothesis that the translation was executed in England. Such conditions could not have been created in Norway: A Norse emissary purchasing chivalric literature could quite conceivably have come into possession of one manuscript containing *lais*. However, it must be regarded as rather unlikely that he would have been able to acquire a number of such manuscripts.

The third location, not precisely known, is the place of origin of a thirteenth-century list of *lais* and romances—the so-called Shrewsbury-list—belonging to a monastery in Chester, Cheshire, during the thirteenth century.⁹ It is unknown whether it was in possession of the Benedictines of St. Werburg or of the Dominicans of Chester.¹⁰ Additional testimony to Old French *lais* having been known in England outside Reading, Oxford, and the royal court is found in *La Vie Seint Edmund Le Rei*, written by Denis Piramus at the end of the twelfth century, where he refers in a condescending manner to a “Dame Marie” who was a composer of *lais*.¹¹

An Old Norse translator would have journeyed to England by sea, probably with a trade ship, arriving for instance at King’s Lynn, the main port for Norwegian merchants. His whereabouts thereafter are impossible to map—but the apparent connection between the Norse manuscript and Harley 978 makes both Reading Abbey and Oxford reasonable locations. Although the translator’s identity will remain unknown to posterity, it is possible to compose a list of criteria he would need to fulfill. The translator must have received an education at an unusually high level, thus obtaining substantial skills in both reading and writing. His language skills must have been quite impressive, as he would have to have been fluent in Norse and Old French. He also would have known some Latin and perhaps some Early Middle English. A liaison must have existed between the translator and King Hákon Hákonarson, and the king was probably aware of the translator’s linguistic skills. Furthermore, the translator must have traveled to England between 1220 and 1260, perhaps to one of the aforementioned locations. Thus, a suitable candidate would be a man of the clergy staying in, for instance, Reading or Oxford during the second third of the thirteenth century. Alas, all records of

students in Oxford during the thirteenth century were lost in a fire,¹² and with them what could have constituted a list of plausible candidates for the role of translator.

Nevertheless, a search for suitable candidates in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, the collection of Norwegian medieval letters and documents, yields a list of sixteen men fulfilling these criteria, though there is unfortunately little, if any, information on their further movements in England. In chronological order, the candidates are:

The Cistercian monk Rikard, emissary to England in 1218–1219, possibly in Yarmouth. He was in London with Archdeacon Nikolas in 1221.¹³

Nikolas, Archdeacon of Hjaltland (Shetland), emissary with the monk Rikard in 1221. He was present at a *riksmøte* (state sitting) in mainland Norway in 1223 and was later recorded as a papal delegate in 1226.¹⁴

Ivar Bodde and entourage, emissaries for King Hákon in London in 1222.¹⁵

Andreas, Archdeacon of Bergen, emissary in England 1223–1224.¹⁶

Asgaut, emissary of King Hákon in England in 1223 and 1225.¹⁷

The monk Galfrid, Abbott Sigvald of Hovedøya, and the priest Gaut, present in Bedford in 1224.¹⁸

Vilhelm, monk of the convent of Lyse, present in Lynn in 1225.¹⁹

Peter of Husastad, travelled through England in 1225, when he was elected Archbishop of Nidaros.²⁰

Åskjell Jonsson, Archdeacon in Bergen, present in England in 1225. From 1226, Archbishop of Stavanger.²¹

The canon Benedikt and the clergyman Radulf, emissaries of King Hákon in England in 1228, most likely in Grimsby.²²

Andreas, prior of Lyse, emissary in England, probably Westminster in 1229.²³

Ernisius and the canon Nikolaus from the convent of Lyse, in King's Lynn in 1233.²⁴

The nobleman (*lendr maðr*) Ivar Nef, in England in 1235, possibly London or Grimsby.²⁵

Two ships belonging to Sigurd, Archbishop of Nidaros, are granted safe conduct in English ports in 1236–1237.²⁶

The monk Jon or Johannes, possibly from Hovedøya, in Lynn in 1237.²⁷

Torlak, emissary from King Hákon in England in 1250.²⁸

However, the only known Norse translator, the famous Brother (later Abbot) Robert, most likely the translator of both *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* and *Elis saga ok Rósamundu*, does not figure on this list, but

is just as likely a candidate for the role of translator as any of the others. Furthermore, his absence serves to illustrate the deficiencies of this material, since not all travels were recorded and not all records have survived.

TEXTUAL FACTORS

Turning from the external factors to the texts themselves, several factors indicate that the texts were translated by one individual with a connection to Anglo-Norman England and a knowledge of Anglo-Norman French.²⁹

The stories in the *lais* and the *Strengleikar* are variations on one theme, and consequently the vocabulary used is stereotypical. For instance, the language used in connection with social rank or the concept of love and emotions constitutes a core vocabulary of the stories. A consistent translation of specific Old French words and concepts in N must stem from the translator himself, as later copyists without knowledge of the source texts or access to them hardly could produce such consistency. A mapping of the core vocabulary of the *Strengleikar* in comparison to the Old French sources reveals such a remarkable consistency of translation, indicating not a group of translators, but a single translator. Consistent word-for-word translations from Old French to Norse cannot originate from anyone but the translator himself. It is thus likely that the dialectal/linguistic variations in N were added to the texts post-translation—but before the texts were copied into N. This makes Cook and Tveitane's suggestion of several translators working with fascicules improbable.

Within the *Strengleikar* there are signs of an Anglo-Norman source manuscript and a translator acquainted with Anglo-Norman pronunciation. As expected, the few Old French orthographic traces are found in personal names, where the use of *u* for the vowel combinations *ou*, *u*, and *eu* (for instance, in the story of the knight Milun) indicates an Anglo-Norman source as opposed to a continental French one. In addition, the closing line of one of the *Strengleikar*, *Eskia*, presents the Old French title of the story: *lai de fræðni*. This has been explained as a corrupt form of the Old French title *Fresne*.³⁰ However, the consonant combination [sn] in Anglo-Norman was most likely pronounced as [dn], thus *fresne* as [fredne], giving a possible explanation of the Old Norse form *fræðni*.³¹

A comparative textual analysis leads to a division of the texts into two groups based on common features—both within the corpus of Norse and Old French texts. The first group is constituted by the four initial texts of *Strengleikar*: *Forræða*, *Guimar*, *Eskia*, and *Equitan*, henceforth named the *Guigemar*-group after its first story. Applying

the same principle for the rest, I will call these stories the *Bisclavret*-group.

The internal chronology of the *Guigemar*-group in N is close to that in Harley 978, with the exception of the reversed order of two stories, *Equitan* and *Eskia/Fresne*. The features common to the texts in this group are numerous. The most notable feature of the Old French texts is the frequent reuse of verses from the romance *Roman d'Enéas*, dated to approximately 1160. A mapping of alliterative tautologies also indicates a particular connection between these four Old French texts, although the frequency of such tautologies is markedly highest in the first of them, *Guigemar*.

Harley 978 is dated to approximately 1250, and it is assumed that the *Strengleikar* were translated sometime between 1226 and 1250. It is thus not completely unlikely that a single manuscript, containing *Prologue*, *Guigemar*, *Equitan*, and *Fresne*, was both translated into Norse and copied in Harley 978. Because the references to the personified virtues of *Enéas* in these stories also appear in the *Strengleikar*, they must have been added prior to the translation. These verses are also found in all of the continental manuscripts with stories from the *Guigemar*-group, all postdating Harley 978. The scribal addition of the personified virtues must have happened before the Norse translation and the transfer of the texts to France.

The Norse *Guigemar*-stories are framed by the two parts original to the *Strengleikar*, a newly composed first prologue and the narrator's moralizing addition closing the story of *Equitan*. Surrounding the *Guigemar*-group, these sections resemble a prologue and an epilogue. However, the moralizing "epilogue" is not an epilogue in the strictest sense, since its content is specifically tied to one particular story instead of the entire group of texts. Nevertheless, these four stories stand out as a group within the *Strengleikar*, and a comparative analysis of all of the texts reveals a number of common features for this specific group, in particular the use of a variety of alliterative devices. Briefly presented, the common alliterative features of the Old Norse *Guigemar*-group (and less prominent in the *Bisclavret*-group) are:

Vowel alliteration

The distribution of identical/dissimilar initial vowel in such alliterations

Cross alliteration

Serial alliterations

Alliterative translation of Old French alliterative tautologies

Specific alliterative combinations with a particular high frequency

The frequency of alliterations in entire texts.

The use of alliterations in the descriptions of protagonists
The amount of added alliterations in such descriptions

There are thus a number of stylistic reasons for suggesting the existence of a *Guigemar*-group separate from the rest of the *Strengleikar*. The stylistic and linguistic unity of this group is a further indication of a translation made in at least two batches, from at least two Old French manuscripts. However, the above-mentioned consistent translations of core vocabulary throughout the collection can originate neither from multiple translators nor later scribes, but only from a single translator. Put together, this is a clear indication that one translator worked with several source texts. Perhaps the translator came across a manuscript containing the Old French *Guigemar*-group, translated this, and concluded his work by adding his own moralizing epilogue with a newly composed and maladroit Latin verse at the very end. One or several manuscripts—perhaps a single collection—containing the rest of the *Strengleikar*-stories then caught his attention, and he continued his work, translating the texts constituting the *Bisclavret*-group.

The results from my research indicate that the *Strengleikar* were translated in England, and that this happened in at least two batches. The varying content, style and chronology of the Old French manuscripts, and the reflections of these in the Old Norse texts imply that the source texts are more likely to originate from several manuscripts than from a single one. This view is reinforced by the consistency of translations and the alliterative patterns in the Old Norse texts. The translator then returned to Norway and presented his work to King Hákon in Bergen. At some point the stories were copied in Norway as a collective work, where several scribes left traces of their individual dialects on the stories. The majority of the stories display a linguistic connection to the western parts of Norway, whereas a smaller group is linked to Eastern Norway. Based on linguistic variation, Tveitane has suggested a subdivision of these two groups, for a total of at least five text redactors represented through their idiolects.³² and, if this is correct, the *Strengleikar* in N is the product of a scriptorium of a considerable size, perhaps connected to a town or a monastery. The methods of the scribes working with the *Strengleikar* demonstrate their typical medieval education, as they rearrange, abbreviate and expand their material as they see fit. Although it is impossible to determine the number of copies between the original translation and the texts in N, the dialectal variation is a witness to at least one copy being made—and lost—in Norway. It is likely that this linguistic variation would fade through each process of copying, and that it stems from the direct original to N.

A copy in between the original translation and N was the source text for the Icelandic *Gvímars saga*, found in an eighteenth-century manuscript, Reykjavík, Lbs. 840 4to (K).³³ The time gap of some 500 years between these texts has erased the dialectal variation, and there are not sufficient grounds for comparing dialectal features of *Gvímars saga* with those displayed in N. The Icelandic version of this story may thus originate from the original translation, a copy of this, or from the copy adding the dialectal variation to N, i.e., probably one step before N in the textual genesis. This uncertainty is marked by the use of arrows and question marks in Figure 1, which illustrates the textual migration from the arrival of the translator in England.

Both the editors Keyser and Unger³⁴ and the philologist Rudolf Meissner³⁵ believed in a limited and short transmission of the *Strengleikar* with few alterations from the original translation to the texts in N. The research on the *Strengleikar* after 1970, in particular Tveitane's study of dialects in N,³⁶ the evaluations of textual history made by Cook and Tveitane in their edition of the *Strengleikar*,³⁷ and Marianne Kalinke's research on the Icelandic *Gvímars saga*,³⁸ have proven that the *Strengleikar* in N are a more complex and heterogenic material than previously believed. In particular, the relations between the Old French *Guigemar*, the Old Norwegian *Guiamar*, and the Icelandic *Gvímars saga* demonstrate that the textual transmission from the translation of Old French *lais* and to the texts known from N includes at least one, and perhaps several, now lost intermediary manuscripts.

As summarized above, my research suggests a particular bond between the stories in the *Guigemar*-group. A plausible explanation for this bond is that the translation of the *Strengleikar* was executed in several batches, and that the *Guigemar*-group originates from a separate Old French manuscript. An extended textual transmission where these considerations are included is illustrated by Figure 2, where the *Guigemar*-group and the *Bisclavret*-group are separated and marked as two separate sources. The Old French manuscripts H (BL, Harley 978), S (BNF, n.a. fr. 1104), and P (BNF, fr. 2168) contain texts from both groups, represented by the intermediate link α . The manuscripts T (Cologne, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Cod. Bodmer 82), Q (BNF, fr. 24432), and C (BL, Cotton Vespasian B.xiv) contain only texts belonging to the *Bisclavret*-group, represented by the intermediate link β . Attempts have been made to establish stemma for the Old French manuscripts, but their relationship remains blurred.³⁹ In the figure this stemmatic uncertainty is reflected by the triangle pointing downwards. Both the original Old Norse translation and the manuscript N predate all the transmitted Old French manuscripts, and this model is not an accurate stemmatic, nor a chronological

illustration, but rather a simplified and schematic model of the textual transmission. Present research groups the Old French manuscripts differently for each individual *lai*, thus supporting the presumed existence of multiple Old French collections of *lais* with varying content—and thus also the existence of a possible collection containing only *Guigemar*-group.

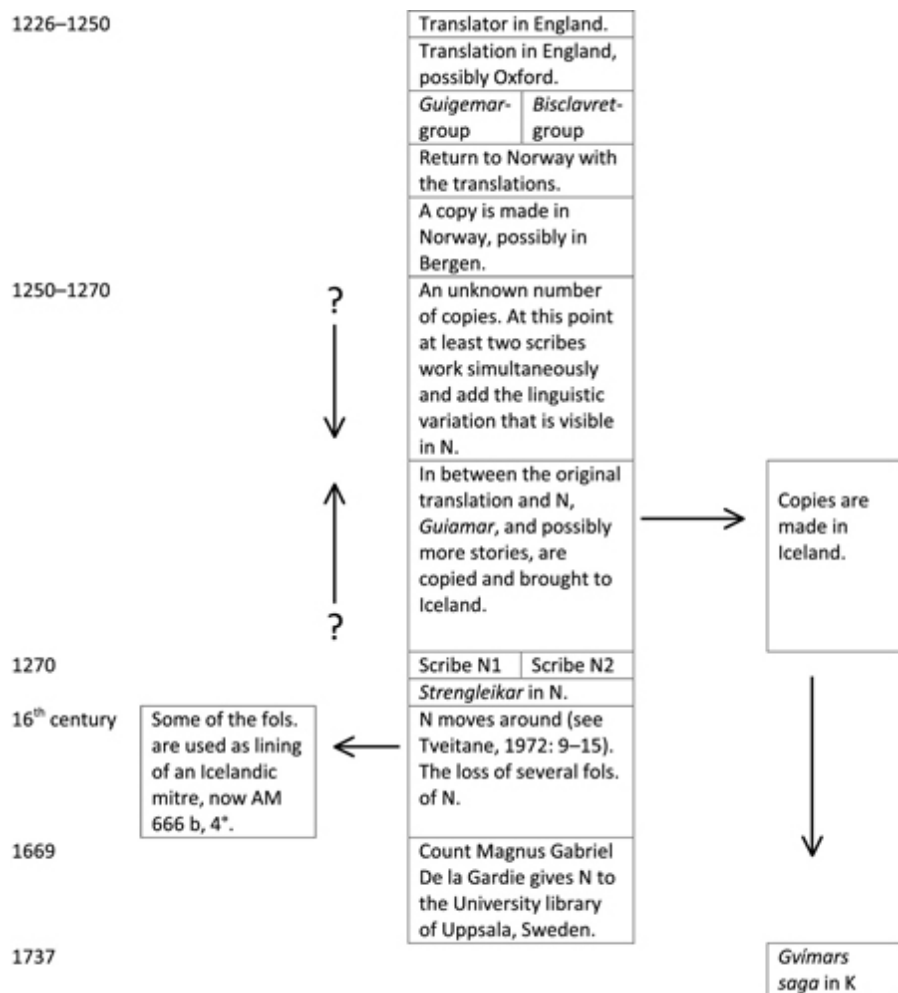


Figure 1. Possible textual migration of *Strengleikar* in N and *Gvímars saga* in K.

Figure 2 demonstrates the possibility of not one, but at least two Old French manuscripts being the sources for the Old Norse *Strengleikar*. In my opinion the *Guigemar*-group originates from a separate Old French manuscript. The derivation of the *Bisclavret*-group remains uncertain, but then there is nothing in my results supporting a further division of this group.

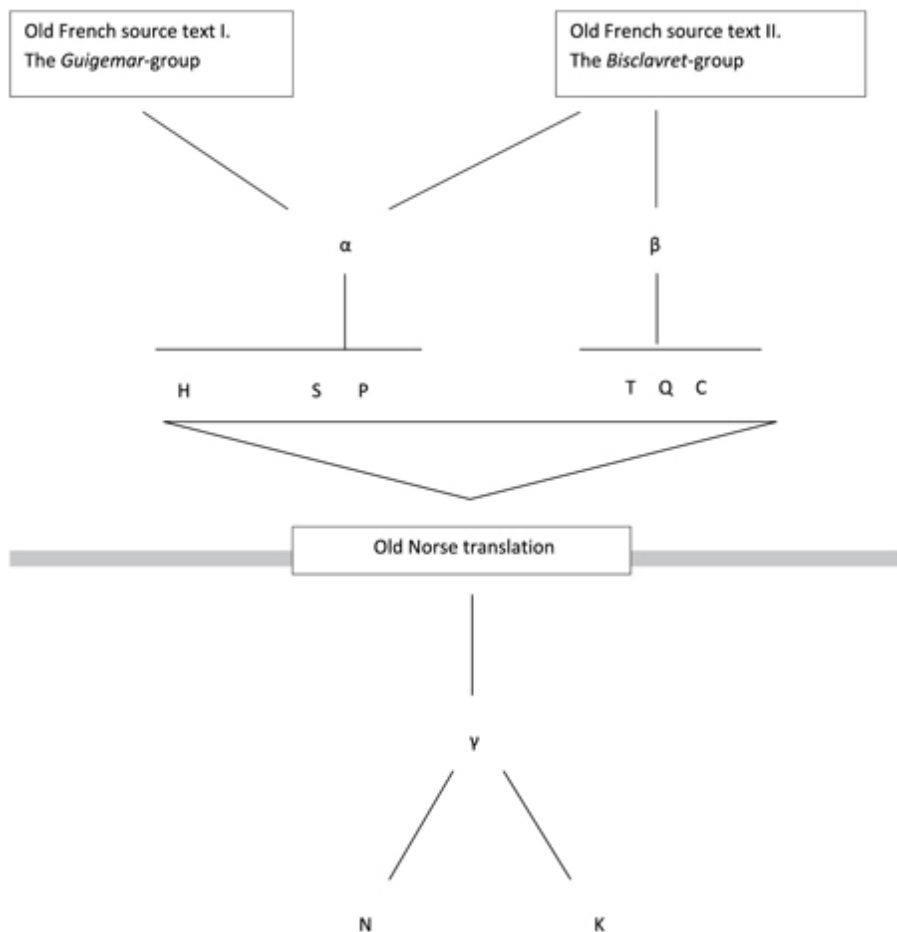


Figure 2. An extended textual migration for *Strengleikar* based on at least two Old French source texts.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although a mid-thirteenth-century purchase of a single Anglo-Norman manuscript is imaginable, it is less likely that an emissary from the Norwegian King Hákon got hold of not only one, but several manuscripts, all containing texts of the *lais* genre. Historical aspects as well as both Old Norse and Old French textual features strongly suggest a center of learning or a monastery in England as a possible location for the translation. If an Old Norse translator executed his work in England, this would explain the lack of both physical evidence and literary reference to Old French manuscripts ever having been in Norway. Furthermore, this would place all of the source texts for the translation (including those known only from continental French manuscripts) in England in the mid-thirteenth century. Both the external and the internal factors surrounding the *Strengleikar* point

towards a translation having been executed in England, and the research done on this collection of translated short narratives illustrates the need for further research on and a possible re-evaluation of the genesis of the rest of the translated *riddarasögur*.

In my opinion the relationship, not only between the *Strengleikar* and the *lais*, but also in between each individual *Strengleikar*-story, holds a unique position in the Old Norse translated literature. The manuscript situation and the textual proximity between the Old French primary manuscripts and the Old Norwegian manuscript N provide an opportunity to study the *Strengleikar* and their Old French source texts as a series of variations over a specific theme. They are thus suited not only for textual comparisons between Old French source texts and Old Norse translations, but also for thematic comparisons between the individual stories within each language. The situation for other *riddarasögur* is more challenging.

The complexity and the heterogeneity of the Old Norwegian translated literature in relation to source texts, transmission, and manuscript situations affirm that there is not one method, one approach, suitable for this group as a whole. These works should be studied both as literature in their own right, as well as in relation to their possible source texts. Moreover, the relationship between the translated works and between these translated works and the indigenous literature merits further scholarly attention.

EINARR SKÚLASON, SNORRI STURLUSON, AND THE POST-PAGAN MYTHOLOGICAL KENNING

Christopher Abram

The history of skaldic poetry in Iceland in the post-conversion period could with some justification be written as a process by which a living oral tradition morphed into a literate, largely academic activity. In her seminal study of the topic, aptly entitled *Tools of Literacy*, Guðrún Nordal has shown how, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, skaldic verse became “a crucial tool in scholastic learning and historiography,” as well as a quintessential symbol of Iceland’s cultural patrimony: its great antiquity and its conceptual roots in pagan myth meant that it could be figured as a “classical” literature of the Icelanders’ own.¹ Although there probably never was a complete breakdown of the skaldic tradition, fewer and fewer of these verses seem to have been composed between the mid-eleventh and mid-twelfth century, and only the reconfiguration of skaldic poetry as an object worthy of scholarly attention prevented the form from dwindling into moribundity.

It is intuitively simple to explain the changing fortunes of skaldic verse in the centuries following the conversion of Iceland to Christianity. Iceland’s traditional poetry was so tightly bound up with paganism—it was the divine gift of Óðinn, who was *de facto* patron of all Norse skalds; skaldic diction drips with mythological referents at every turn—that it must have been incompatible with the Christian mores that the fledgling church was trying to inculcate. So skaldic verse may have been suppressed by authority (though this possibility credits the earliest Icelandic ecclesiastical structures with more influence than they really had, perhaps) or it may have become taboo, unfashionable or simply too much trouble to persist with. The well-known story of Hallfreðr Óttarsson’s difficult conversion at the end of the tenth century, whether or not it is apocryphal, reveals how problematic it could be for a pagan Icelandic poet to remove the pagan references from his verse, even when placed under severe pressure from Óláfr Tryggvason.² Hallfreðr’s poetry shows—in the context in which his saga places it—a very slow progression in his poetic development, as much as in his reorientation from paganism to Christianity.³ Although he has no problem in incorporating God and certain basic tenets of the Christian faith into his poetry, he struggles

to take out the references to pagan deities. As an indigenous pantheist, of course, Hallfreðr is open-minded about the possibility of there being many gods, but as a Norse skald he relies upon—and derives great benefit from—both divine inspiration and a pagan mythological idiom. In the saga, Hallfreðr tells the king, quite explicitly, that Christianity seems less *skáldligr* (“poetic” or “befitting to poets”) to him than paganism.⁴ Paganism was fundamental to the poet’s profession, performance, persona, and pride.

Some eleventh-century skalds who worked for the new Christian kings attempted to Christianize their verse by the simple expediency of eliminating references to pagan deities from it. Sigvatr Þórðarson, possibly the first major Icelandic poet to serve only Christian chieftains, exemplifies this tendency. Sigvatr was St. Óláfr Haraldsson’s poet in the period from about 1016–29. Óláfr maintained a substantial retinue of skalds, befitting his status as sole king of a newly united Norway, of whom Sigvatr was the most prolific (or his work the most enduring).⁵ We know nothing of Sigvatr’s schooling in skaldic composition, although there is good reason to doubt the veracity of the anecdote preserved in *Flateyjarbók* that explains Sigvatr’s facility in versifying as the result of his eating a pseudo-miraculous fish of some sort.⁶ But it is probable that he grew up in a cultural milieu that was broadly pagan—his father, Þórðr Sigvaldaskáld, was poet to a leader of the (pagan) Jómsvíkingar in the last decades of the eleventh century, and there is no evidence that, back in Iceland, the family was early to convert. Sigvatr’s first patron was a Christian—a saint in the making, no less!—and his work, by the standards of the mid-eleventh century, counts as Christian poetry. Which is to say: Sigvatr, with great consistency, omits references to pagan deities and figures from non-Christian mythology in his verse, eschewing kennings that make reference to pagan narrative traditions. Sigvatr’s court poetry is more post-pagan, perhaps, than truly Christian, in that he does not address specifically Christian themes, but purges his idiom of pagan elements as a courtesy to (or a requirement of) his subject and audience.

In this respect, Sigvatr Þórðarson is typical of a trend that has been identified in the history of skaldic poetry: the main effect of the conversion upon the “religious” content of skaldic stanzas was to dramatically reduce the frequency of their references to pagan gods. With the publication of his study of the “mythological content” of skaldic kennings in 1934, Jan de Vries asserted confidently that a not unexpected pattern—a sudden and steep drop in the amount of “pagan” diction in verse from the beginning of the eleventh century onwards—is observable in the extant corpus.⁷ More surprising to de Vries was a subsequent increase in kennings with mythological

antecedents in poetry of the second half of the twelfth century (see [Figure 1](#)).⁸ His findings—based on the distribution of Óðinn-kennings in skaldic stanzas of different periods—suggested (to him) a revival of interest in paganism once the cultural dust of conversion had settled, as it were. De Vries was inclined to see this mythological renaissance as having an antiquarian impulse behind it. It was not part of a religious revival, but a rediscovery or re-appropriation of traditional poetic tropes in a scholarly context.⁹

De Vries’s findings were challenged robustly by Hans Kuhn.¹⁰ Although Kuhn had many methodological criticisms of de Vries’s work, his main argument was that, by ignoring the provenance of the stanzas that he mined for kenning data, de Vries’s conclusions about the significance of the twelfth-century renaissance were invalid. It stood to reason, suggested Kuhn, that poems composed at the courts of the Christian rulers of mainland Scandinavia would lack references to pagan deities. But in Iceland—whence little eleventh- and early-twelfth-century skaldic verse has come down to us—the absence of Christian royal patrons meant that skalds would have been free to make their poems as pagan as they wanted. In Kuhn’s opinion, paganism persisted in Iceland, as a viable religious and cultural force, well beyond the conversion. Thus, the “renaissance” that de Vries identified as beginning around 1150 was in truth nothing of the sort: it was instead an unveiling of a hidden tradition in Icelandic poetry that had persisted in some sort of secrecy, or perhaps simply without being recorded. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, of course, and so Kuhn felt free to argue that our understanding of this period has been skewed by the preponderance of stanzas in the surviving corpus that had their origin at the Norwegian royal court.

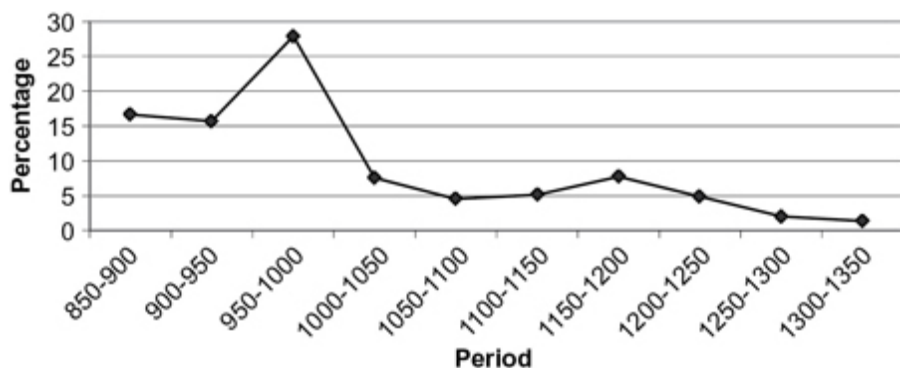


Figure 1. Percentage of surviving skaldic stanzas that contain mythological kennings (after de Vries)

The debate between de Vries and Kuhn, as these things tend to,

produced more heat than light, but subsequent work by Bjarne Fidjestøl has confirmed that there are significant problems with de Vries's methods and results.¹¹ Fidjestøl re-evaluated the dating of the stanzas in question, re-examined the mythological content of the kennings they contain, crunched the numbers, and came up with a new graph that looks, at first sight, very similar to the one of de Vries's to which he objected so seriously (see [Figure 2](#)).

Here, Fidjestøl has converted his findings into a “rolling average,” in which the raw percentages of mythological kennings per stanza in each quarter-century have been replaced “by adding to the figures representing a given period the figures from the two adjacent periods. The purpose of this operation is to even out the impact of the greatly varying amount of transmitted stanzas from each period.”¹² In practice, this means that the result for the period “11d” (approximately 1175–199) is the sum of the results for the three quarter-centuries from 1150 to 1225.

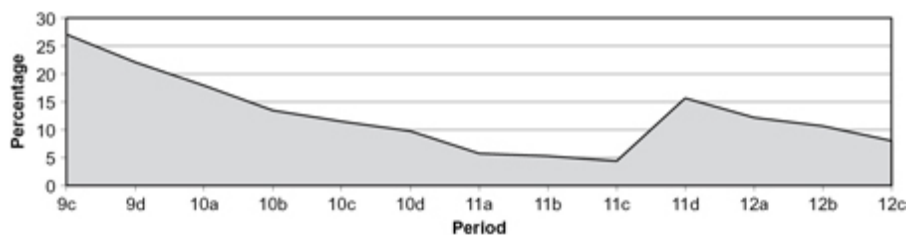


Figure 2. Rolling average of percentage of surviving stanzas that contain mythological kennings (after Fidjestøl)

For all their superficial similarity, there is a key difference between Fidjestøl's revised chart and that of de Vries: the “renaissance” in mythological allusions in skaldic kennings is even more apparent, but it starts slightly later. Whereas de Vries believed the revival of pagan poetics to have begun around 1150, Fidjestøl's rolling average pushes the date of the renaissance's beginning back to the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Fidjestøl was unequivocal about how we should explain this phenomenon:

The development shown [in this chart] corresponds to what might be expected. There is a relatively steady decrease in the use of [mythological] kennings throughout the centuries, only broken by a learned revival due to the poetry of Snorri Sturluson and his nephews. Of the revival after 1150, prior to the period of the Sturlungs, postulated by de Vries there is no trace. This study reinforces the criticism of de Vries's hypothesis, which in my view seems to lack any solid foundation.¹³

As a small consolation to Jan de Vries, Fidjestøl's findings would also seem to go against Kuhn's idea of a lingering afterlife of paganism in Icelandic poetry. I am sure, however, that Kuhn would be inclined to criticize Fidjestøl and de Vries in the same light, since neither scholar makes any distinction between poetry composed in Iceland and poetry composed abroad. Since Fidjestøl restricts his analysis to poetry composed by poets associated with a given ruler's court—to facilitate its dating—many stanzas are excluded from his data. His corpus is therefore highly selective and could be viewed as tendentious, even though his choice is a consistent and practical solution to the significant problems of authenticity that attend any approach to skaldic poetry that relies upon absolute datings.

I do not intend to subject Fidjestøl's methodology to further scrutiny here (though I would be very interested to see his experiments repeated with the data divided up according to geographical origin and generic provenance, and with anonymous, "spurious," or undatable examples included).¹⁴ But I do wish to revisit his conclusions. If the increase in mythological allusion in thirteenth-century skaldic kennings can be attributed to Snorri Sturluson and his immediate circle, it seems fair to ask where the mythological information that they used in their kennings came from. Snorri was a truly original scholar in the fields of Norse poetics, history, and mythography. How far was he also an originator—rather than an imitator or continuer—of "pagan" skaldic traditions? In exploring this question, I shall compare Snorri's poetry and mythography to the work of an earlier Icelandic poet, Einarr Skúlason, who was active in the first half of the twelfth century, up to 1159, at least—placing him at the scene of de Vries's mythological "renaissance" (which Fidjestøl has told us did not take place).

We have few facts about Einarr Skúlason, but they are salient ones. Einarr was a kinsman of Egill Skallagrímsson—and therefore also of Snorri Sturluson—and local to Borgarfjörður, where both Egill and Snorri lived. He seems to have been a favorite poet of Snorri's: as Martin Chase notes, *Snorra Edda* and *Heimskringla* between them quote twice as much of Einarr's verse as from any other poet.¹⁵ He served several rulers in Norway during at least two stays in that country. He was—probably—an ordained priest; he appears as such in a register of the clerics in western Iceland in 1143.¹⁶ Einarr's fame rests chiefly on his great poem *Geisli*, composed for King Eysteinn Haraldsson and recited in the cathedral at Trondheim, perhaps in 1153.¹⁷ This poem is the oldest known *drápa* on an explicitly Christian subject—the life and miracles of St. Óláfr—composed in a Christian idiom, and as such Einarr can certainly be regarded as an innovator: no previous skald had adapted the prestigious *drápa* form—appropriate to the praise of

important secular rulers in earlier eras—to a hagiographic or devotional subject. The influence of *Geisli* on other large-scale Christian poems in Iceland was profound.¹⁸ It is a towering achievement, and one which opened the way for other Christian skalds to appropriate the courtliest forms of traditional verse for Christian purposes. Einarr's *Geisli* marks a transition in the history of skaldic poetics; if hitherto poets had Christianized their verse by first removing references to the old gods and replacing them with Christ, referred to stereotypically in bland kennings like “King of Rome” or “Ruler of Heaven,” *Geisli* gives the first hint of the richness accessible to poets through a blending of traditional style, Biblical imagery, aspects of Latin hymnody, and an exemplary Christian subject.¹⁹

Aside from *Geisli*, ten further named poems and a disputed but considerable number of *lausavísur* and fragments have been attributed to Einarr.²⁰ Of the named poems, five are *drápur* in praise of secular rulers: Einarr was clearly in demand as a panegyrist as well as a verse hagiographer. His versatility is demonstrated by ten surviving stanzas of end-rhymed *runhent* verse, the rare form with which his illustrious forebear Egill famously saved his neck when he composed *Höfuðlausn* overnight to appease Eiríkr blóðøx at York. *Runhent* verse, which may have been influenced by the rhyming practices of Latin hymns, was never a form popular with skalds, and Einarr's attempt at it bespeaks a self-confident willingness to experiment beyond *dróttkvætt*. If, as Russell Poole suggests, Einarr's *Runhenda* is indeed modeled after Egill's *Höfuðlausn*, it also seems to show a poet who was well aware of his artistic as well as his genealogical lineage.²¹ That Egill had been a pagan poet who composed on pagan themes and made extensive use of pagan imagery in his verse did not prevent the priest Einarr from engaging with it positively.

A more extreme engagement with pagan traditions is represented by Einarr's most controversial composition, the so-called *Øxarflokkr*. Ten half- or full stanzas of this poem are preserved, piecemeal, in manuscripts of Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*.²² It seems as though these stanzas make up part of an exchange of gifts between Einarr and an unknown king, who has given the poet an axe: *Øxarflokkr* is a poetic thank-you note and requital in the conventional courtly manner. If, to modern ears, an axe seems like an unusual gift for a clergyman, what Einarr composed in return for it is even stranger. *Øxarflokkr* is probably the most richly “mythological” of all twelfth-century skaldic poems. All but one of its ten stanzas alludes in a kenning (or several kennings) to an image drawn from traditional myth or legend. Six out of ten go so far as to use kennings in which pagan deities appear as base words or determinants (although not as referents): Einarr mentions Óðinn, Njörðr, Óðr, and Freyja, who appears over and over.

It is a curious fact of Norse mythological history that the single surviving poem, of any date, that is most firmly fixated on Freyja—that connoisseur of erotic verse and patroness of sexual delight—seems to have been composed by a man who also recited in praise of St. Óláfr in Trondheim cathedral.

There is nothing of a sexual nature in *Øxarflokkr*, however. Freyja is used as part of a kenning-complex by which Einarr attempts to describe the splendid golden adornment on his new axe. Over the course of the poem, he employs a wide range of mythological allusions in his gold- and treasure-kennings, almost as if he is testing the limits of his audience's (and his own) knowledge of Freyja and her connections:²³

~~Stándiðs dæling
Sagn af Óða's öskumpan's eyes
Stúlufrið þröðglaum's child
Frey's niece
dýr þá bráms óðurs [near Freyr's niece's] mother
Stúlufrið þröðglaum's daughter
Brightly lit daughter Vana's Ván's bride
Gefn's Gefn's daughter
Freyja's Freyja's jaw~~

There are essentially two mythological conceits in operation in Einarr's kennings. He represents gold by reference to Freyja's tears or weeping. The axe itself, which, he wishes to emphasize, is a great treasure, is being alluded to by play on the meaning of Freyja's daughter's name (Hnoss) which appears occasionally as a simplex for "treasure, precious object," normally in poetry.²⁴

Bjarne Fidjestøl excluded *Øxarflokkr* from his corpus of kenning-bearing poetry from the twelfth century, as "it can be seen to be strongly biased, as it more or less amounts to a skaldic exercise in the use of mythological kennings transmitted in it."²⁵ Jan de Vries and Hans Kuhn, quite typically, disagreed about the poem: the former considered it to be a novelty, an early example of a revived interest in pagan poetics that we can identify with the skaldic renaissance, while Kuhn considered these stanzas to represent an unbroken tradition of composition in the pagan manner.²⁶

It is hard to reconcile the idea that Einarr was somehow plugged into contemporary pagan culture with his priesthood and his authorship of *Geisli*, but there is no need to try: there is clearly no pagan sentiment, no religiosity, behind Einarr's lines. These are mythological allusions rendered anodyne by their excess. The

incessant repetition of the same idea makes *Øxarflokkr* look like what it probably was meant as: an extremely self-conscious and learned exercise in traditional kenning-composition, one that smells more of the classroom than the pagan temple. Einarr's Freyja-kennings are designed to show off technique rather than to display a religious sensibility. In fact, this group of stanzas would (and does) look very much at home in the mythopoetic treatises of the "skaldic renaissance." There is no wonder that Snorri cites the stanzas of *Øxarflokkr* so copiously in *Skáldskaparmál*: Einarr has provided him with a ready-made hand-list of kennings for "gold" and "treasure," arranged with an almost taxonomic precision around the figure of Freyja. We know nothing of the circumstances under which Einarr composed *Øxarflokkr*, but it would not be entirely surprising if his receipt of the axe were a scenario that was invented specially to allow him to demonstrate, preserve, or possibly create a repertoire of gold- and treasure-kennings, just as Snorri would do in the future.

I have termed these references "mythological allusions," but it is worth enquiring what precisely they are allusions to. After the sheer number of mythological kennings that *Øxarflokkr* contains, its most notable characteristic is the obscurity of its references. Einarr does not allude, in the main, to the grand narratives of the mythological Eddic poems. Some of his kennings certainly reveal aspects of a general mythological knowledge: he knows Gautr and Váfuðr to be by-names for Óðinn (in stanza 1, a shield is called *meginhurð Gauts* [Gautr's mighty gate]; *þing Váfaðar* [assembly of Váfuðr] is a kenning for battle in stanza 5), both of which are known from the *Poetic Edda*;²⁷ Njǫrðr's paternity of Freyja is mentioned in *Grímnismál* 43, *Skírnismál* 41, and *Brymskviða* 22. But beyond these simple facts, Einarr's mythological kennings are highly specific and specialized, and it is difficult to identify any sources for them. They do, however, tend towards being examples of what we might call "skaldic mythology." That is to say, there are certain pieces of mythological information that are attested in skaldic verse—usually because they are part of a useful kenning-complex—but which do not refer to any full-scale narrative that survives. It is reasonable to assume, of course, that the "narrative precipitates" (to use Frederic Amory's term)²⁸ of these kennings did exist in coherent textual forms at some point, but we cannot know much about when, where or how they circulated.

The first gold-kenning in *Øxarflokkr*, *grátr Mardallar*, refers to a story about Freyja weeping tears of gold. This is a well-known attribute of Freyja's, but we do not, in fact, possess any narrative explication of the trope earlier than manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, in which Freyja weeps golden tears of sadness when her husband, Óðr, is away from her on long journeys. The single occurrence of this

kenning-type in poetry ascribed to the pre-Christian era is in the final stanza of Egill's *Höfuðlausn*, a text with which Einarr was probably familiar, as I have mentioned.²⁹ In Egill's verse, Freyja is not named; the circumlocution there is *vagna vára tár* (tears of the goddesses of the chariots):

Njóti bauga
sem Bragi auga
vagna vára
eða vili tára.³⁰

May he avail himself of rings as Bragi avails himself of the eye of the defender of the Wain [ÓÐINN > WISDOM] or as Vili avails himself of the tears of the goddesses of chariots [FREYJA > GOLD].³¹

The plural *vára* (goddesses) is inexplicable, mythologically speaking: Freyja is the only goddess who possesses a chariot as an attribute in the sources as they survive. Russell Poole has suggested that we read the plural as singular in this instance in order to secure Freyja's place in the stanza and to ensure that gold emerges as the kenning's referent.³² Evidence for the myth of Freyja's golden tears in pagan culture may rest, it seems, upon a grammatical quirk and editorial intervention.

The Freyja-name *Mardöll* is also absent from the *Poetic Edda*. It is, however, found in a limited but interesting selection of skaldic stanzas. Apart from a single appearance in a *pula* of Freyja-names that circulates with *Snorra Edda*, *Mardöll* is only ever found in the genitive and as part of a kenning for gold. The earliest occurrence of this formulation is found, fittingly enough, in a verse ascribed to St. Óláfr in *Flateyjarbók*:

Ár stóð eik en dýra,
jarladóms, með blómi
harðla græn, sem hirðar,
hvert misseri, vissu:
nú hefr (bekkjar) tré bliknat
brátt (Mardallar gráti
lind hefr) laufi (bundit
línu-jörð) í Gørðum.³³

Once the dear oak of the earldom [WOMAN] stood all green and in blossom each season, as the people of Hördaland knew. Now all at once the tree of the bench [WOMAN] adorned with leaves, has turned pale with *Mardöll*'s weeping [GOLD]: the lime-tree of the headdress [WOMAN] has land in Russia.³⁴

As is the case with most of Óláfr's alleged *lausavísur*, the attribution of this verse to the saint is almost certainly apocryphal. It is nonetheless intriguing to speculate whether this attribution was current and this stanza known in the mid-twelfth century. If so, we might suspect that Einarr, Óláfr's devoted encomiast, has borrowed this kenning directly from the *lausavísa*, its connection with his holy hero (even if spurious) lending it prestige and assuring that its pagan content was not unacceptable to a Christian poet: if sanctified by its inclusion in a verse of Óláfr's, other poets need not hesitate in retaining *grátr Mardallar* in their repertoire of kennings for gold.

Apart from this shared usage in *Øxarflokkr* and the pseudo-Óláfian *lausavísa*, instances of the "tears of Mardöll" kenning-type are restricted to three poems that postdate Einarr and which could all be described as belonging to the "skaldic renaissance." Most conspicuously, Snorri's *Háttatal* has the phrase *fagrregn hvarma Mardallar* (fair rain of Mardöll's eyelids) in stanza 42.³⁵ The second occurrence of the kenning-type is in another text with strong connections to Snorri: this is stanza 5 of the anonymous Eddic-style composition *Bjarkamál in fornu*, which exists only in *Skáldskaparmál*.³⁶ The appeal of this particular verse to Snorri is obvious, and he makes it explicit in his prose introduction to the two stanzas of the poem that he quotes: "í Bjarkamálum inum fornum eru tölð mǫrg gulls heiti" (in *Bjarkamál in fornu* many gold-*heiti* are enumerated). Snorri is interested in poems that have done some of his work for him already, in assembling and taxonomizing groups of poetic devices in convenient proximity. Whatever its actual date of composition, *Bjarkamál in fornu* shares the learned impulse to collect and categorize that is a hallmark of *Skáldskaparmál* and which typifies much of the grammatical and poetical scholarship of the Icelandic renaissance.³⁷ *Bjarkamál in fornu* was also supposedly a source used by Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum*, linking this text with the profound interest in myths and legends with Danish connections that Nordal identifies as being another defining characteristic of renaissance poetry in both Iceland and Orkney.³⁸ The gold-kennings in *Øxarflokkr* that are based upon referents from Danish legendary material—the seed of Fróði's servants (stanza 3), the meal of Fróði (stanza 6), Gautrekkr's swans' road-embers (stanza 5)—also belong to this learned milieu, which looked to Denmark for many of its foundational narratives. There is a remarkable degree of coherence between the kenning-types that Einarr favors in *Øxarflokkr* and those found in *Bjarkamál in fornu*, both of which are preserved in the same context and fulfill the same function—as reserves of kennings for Snorri to mine in *Skáldskaparmál*.

Another connection that these two poems share is with the

Orcadian text *Málsháttakvæði*, another product of the renaissance, although a more miscellaneous and, on the face of it, less academic exercise than *Øxarflokkr*. *Málsháttakvæði* (stanza 7) shares with *Bjarkamál in fornu* a reference to the legendary Danish hero Þoðvarr bjarki, and stanza 8 has the line *Mardallar var glysligr grátr* (Mardöll's weeping was glittering).³⁹ Like *Øxarflokkr*, *Málsháttakvæði* is a *drápa* attributed to a churchman—in this case, Bjarni Kolbeinsson, bishop of Orkney from 1188 to 1222 or 1223.⁴⁰ Although Snorri does not cite *Málsháttakvæði*, this poem survives in but one manuscript copy, at the end of GKS 2367 4to, the Codex Regius of *Snorra Edda*. Its composition is placed in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, the period when Snorri was also (presumably) compiling the material that would make up the *Edda*. Mardöll's weeping tears of gold is a trope that belongs in a very particular milieu—the world of *Snorra Edda* and its Icelandic and Orcadian intertexts, all of which are especially interested in Danish legendary history of the type that we find in the first books of *Gesta Danorum*.

There are, however, no known Danish cultural associations for Hnoss, the shadowy daughter of Freyja who lurks behind kennings in stanzas three, four, and five of *Øxarflokkr*. The conceit of referring to a precious object as a female relative of Freyja's is fully developed and employed with consistency in this poem, but we are in the relatively uncommon position in this case of lacking any other occurrence of this formulation in skaldic verse—earlier or later. These kennings clearly demand a referent that means “treasure,” “precious object” (although we should note that “battle axe” would also fit the bill). As a simple noun, *hnoss* does indeed mean treasure, and it is attested in this usage in a range of poetry, but only in post-conversion verse: Christian poets found the *aðalhending* of *hnoss* and *kross* hard to resist.⁴¹ *Hnoss* appears twice in the *Poetic Edda*—once in *Guðrúnarkviða II* 20 and once in *Guðrúnarhvöt* 18—and in each case the simple noun is appropriate to the context. There is no independent evidence for the existence of a mythological figure named Hnoss in any surviving Old Norse poetry outside of *Øxarflokkr*.

Our identification of Hnoss as the referent of Einarr's kennings therefore depends solely upon Snorri Sturluson, who mentions her as Freyja's daughter in *Gylfaginning*. Snorri's description of Freyja is lengthy, as he explains the meaning of all fourteen of what he claims to be Freyja's names; five of the first six of these names, as well as a first reference to the divine figure of Hnoss, are found here:

Freyja er tignust með Frigg. Hon giptisk þeim manni er Óðr heitir. Dóttir þeira heitir Hnoss. Hon er svá fōgr at af hennar nafni eru hnossir kallaðar þat er fagrt er ok gersemligt. Óðr fór í braut langar

leiðir, en Freyja grætr eptir, en tár hennar er gull rautt. Freyja á mǫrg nǫfn, en sú er sǫk til þess at hon gaf sér ýmis heiti er hon fór með ókunnum fljóðum at leita Óðs. Hon heitir Mardǫll ok Hǫrn, Gefn, Sýr. Freyja átti Brísingamen. Hon er kǫllum Vanadís.⁴²

Freyja is highest in rank next to Frigg. She was married to someone called Óðr. Hnoss is the name of their daughter. She is so beautiful that from her name whatever is beautiful and precious is called *hnossir*. Óðr went on long travels, and Freyja started weeping, and her tears are red gold. Freyja has many names, and the reason for this is that she adopted various names among strange peoples looking for Óðr. She is called Mardǫll and Hǫrn, Gefn, Sýr. Freyja owned the Brísings' necklace. She is known as Lady of the Vanir.⁴³

The information in this short passage reveals a good deal about one facet of Snorri's mythography. It is a combination of general mythological knowledge—Freyja's marriage to Óðr and her ownership of the Brísingamen are well documented—with obscure references to less mainstream "facts" about the goddess, unburdened by source citations. Of particular interest to us is the way that this passage reaches out to skaldic intertexts and to *Øxarflokkr* in particular. That poem contains three of the four cognomens that Snorri gives for Freyja—Mardǫll, Hǫrn, and Gefn. We have seen that Mardǫll is a distinctively skaldic name that appears in poetry closely associated with the twelfth- and thirteenth-century renaissance; Hǫrn is better attested in verse of varying dates, but it is in practice a generic goddess-name that fulfils the function of a base-word for woman kennings; the same is true for Gefn.⁴⁴ Widely used as an element in woman- or Valkyrie-kennings, it is only in *Snorra Edda* that this goddess is identified explicitly with Freyja, and only in *Øxarflokkr* that we find corroboration for Snorri's interpretation. Sýr is not in Einarr's poem—although a single example of its use in a gold-kenning survives⁴⁵—but Freyja's identity as one of the Vanir is alluded to in the kenning *þróttǫflug dóttir Vanabrúðar* (stanza 5).⁴⁶

And then there is Hnoss, of course: Snorri's fondness for folk etymology is on display when he says that *hon er svá fǫgr at af hennar nafni eru hnossir kallaðar þat er fagrt er ok gersemligt*. It looks as though Snorri is providing an etymology for the simple noun *hnoss*, which he gives in the plural, presumably to avoid confusion with the singular goddess. But Hnoss may just as well be a back-formation from *hnossir*, a learned guess about the identity of the character to whom Einarr seemed to refer in *Øxarflokkr*, a poem that I would be inclined to call a source for this part of *Gylfaginning*. The list of Freyja-names that succeeds Vanadís makes Snorri's approach clear to an almost bathetic extent: his seventh example is Sjófn, presumably given this place in

the sequence because of its phonemic closeness to the ordinal numeral *sjaunda*. According to Snorri, it is after her name that affection is called *sjafni*, because she directs the minds of men and women towards love. So it continues: Snorri derives the noun *lof* (permission) from Lofn—she it is who ensures that wooing couples are granted permission to marry (from Frigg or Óðinn, in a role that does not seem consonant with his other functions). Contracts between men and women are called *várar*, says Snorri—Vár is the ninth of Freyja's names in the list. Just like Hq̄rn and Gefn, Sjofn is used non-specifically as a base-word in a few kennings for woman: two verses attributed to Gísli Súrsson have this formulation, as does stanza 14 of the thirteenth-century *Plácitusdrápa*.⁴⁷ Vár, meanwhile, may have a mythological identity separate from Freyja, although their functions are closely related: in *Þrymskviða* 30, at the climax of the mock-wedding, Vár is the deity called upon to hallow the union.⁴⁸ The name Vár probably means “beloved”; Snorri's relating it to *várar* is perfectly sensible, but it is a false etymology whose origins in Snorri's hermeneutic strategies are clear.

The best candidate for Snorri's source for these Freyja-names is one of the *pulur* appended to *Skáldskaparmál* in four of its medieval manuscripts; these texts have no existence separate from the *Edda*. There are three versified lists of goddess-names in the *pulur*, and between them they include all of the cognomens that Snorri gives to Freyja in *Gylfaginning* with the exception of Vanadís. Less widely noted than it should be—among mythographers, in particular—is the fact that only one of these three stanzas talks specifically about Freyja. In the following verses, I have put the names that Snorri applies to Freyja in capitals.

Nú skal ásynjur
alla nefna.
Frigg ok FREYJA
Fulla ok SNOTRA
Gerðr ok Gefjun
GNÁ, LOFN, Skaði
Jorð ok Iðunn
Ilmr, Bil, Njörun.
HLÍN ok Nanna
Hnoss Rindr ok SJQFN
Sól ok Sága
Sigyn ok VQR.
Þá er VÁR, ok SYN
verðr at nefna
en Þrúðr ok Rán

þeim næst talið.
Grét ok at Óði
gulli Freyja.
Heiti eru hennar
[HJQRN Þrungra
SÝR Skjálf GEFN
ok it sama MARDQLL.
Døtr eru hennar]
Hnoss ok Gersemi.⁴⁹

Now shall all the Ásynjur be named. Frigg and Freyja, Fulla and Snotra, Gerðr and Gefjun, Gná, Lofn, Skaði, Jörð and Iðunn, Bil, Njörun.

Hlín and Nanna, Hnoss, Rindr, and Sjöfn, Sól and Saga, Sigyn and Vör. Then there is Vár, and Syn must be named, but Þrúðr and Rán reckoned next to them.

Freyja also wept gold for Óðr. Her names are also Hjörn, Þrungra, Sýr, Skjálf, Gefn, and likewise Mardqll. Her daughters are Hnoss and Gersemi.⁵⁰

The relationship between these *pulur* and the prose of *Gylfaginning* is ill-defined and indirect, since they always accompany *Skáldskaparmál* in the manuscript record. Although Anthony Faulkes, reflecting a scholarly consensus, accepts that the *pulur*—versified lists of synonyms—are twelfth-century compositions, there is no hard textual evidence to prove that they predate the *Edda*.⁵¹ In the case of the *Ásynjur heiti*, however, it seems extremely plausible that Snorri had access to these or a similar set of lists. All the Freyja-names that Snorri elaborates in *Gylfaginning* are present in the *pulur*, but it is apparent that he has mistakenly or deliberately represented as belonging to Freyja names that the *pulur*-poet considered to be entirely separate goddesses.⁵² As well as explaining seven genuine Freyja-*heiti*, Snorri has leveled seven further, independent goddesses into his portrayal of her, and explained each one with an ingenuous piece of etymology that relates to known aspects of Freya's role and character. He has, understandably, chosen obscurer figures to subject to this treatment—names whose referent he was unfamiliar with. In general, these pseudo-Freyjas are found rarely elsewhere in poetry, and in the skaldic corpus rather than the Eddic.⁵³ Even Snorri, with his encyclopaedic knowledge of pre-Christian Norse culture, has no frame of reference that will explain these minor goddesses, who have only been saved from extinction, in some cases, by their collection into these *pulur*. So Snorri has created a new frame of reference for them, borrowing their names to pad out his rather fanciful description of Freyja.

The third stanza also provides us with a potential source for Snorri's treatment of the otherwise obscure Hnoss. It seems strange that he should omit Hnoss's sister, Gersemi, in that case, since *gersemi* is a perfectly common prose word for "treasure"—one would think that this is a ready-made opportunity for further etymological play on Snorri's part, but perhaps the joke would be too obvious with such a straightforward synonym. Also in this verse, it is notable that there are two names that the *pula*-compiler was prepared to accept as belonging to Freyja that are not found in *Gylfaginning*: Þrungra is nowhere else attested, nor does Skjálf occur as a cognomen for Freyja—she is a Finnish princess in *Ynglinga saga* (author: Snorri Sturluson).⁵⁴

Rudolf Simek questions whether Hnoss has an independent mythological existence, still less a place in an authentic pagan pantheon, and concludes that "it is unknown whether Snorri has taken the name from a skaldic kenning or whether he has invented it himself."⁵⁵ I think that the most likely scenario is that Snorri has, in fact, taken the name from a skaldic *pula*, a handy aide-memoire of goddess-*heiti* that was composed prior to his work on the *Edda* and was itself a product of the twelfth-century renaissance of interest in skaldic poetics. Snorri's aim throughout the *Edda* is to collect, preserve, display, and explain textual artifacts relating to traditional poetic culture. The *pulur* do the same thing in a radically compressed form, with only a very limited amount of exposition. Their function is to act as a repository, one which can be accessed by poets and scholars who wished to make use of or elaborate upon the information they contain. It is easy to imagine list-making of this type being one of the first activities of scholars who were interested in preserving a poetic heritage that was starting to languish in Iceland. Before interpretative criticism begins, before literary history can be written, it is necessary to establish an archive. The *pulur* are a database of partially-digested information, which users of the manuscripts of *Skáldskaparmál* presumably found still useful to have around.

But of the origins of the *pulur* we know very little. Where did the information they collate come from? In the case of the *Ásynjur-heiti pulur*, it is tempting to suggest that they may have drawn material from Einarr Skúlason's *Øxarflokkr*. The obscurity of many of the *heiti* in the *pulur* leads me to suspect that the similarities between Einarr's poem, the description of Freyja in *Gylfaginning*, and the lists of cognomens preserved alongside *Skáldskaparmál* can better be explained by positing direct intertextual connections between them than by assuming all draw upon a single body of inherited mythological tradition. *Øxarflokkr* is, in fact, a sort of *pula* itself, albeit a highly elaborate one: its purpose is not to describe the axe that is its purported subject, but to display the range of options available to a

twelfth-century skald who wished to describe a precious object in terms drawn from the pagan idiom. It is a catalogue poem.

In this instance, therefore, I propose that Snorri's passage explaining the meaning of Freyja's names is the third and final stage in a process of collecting and presenting mythological information for the benefit of skaldic practitioners and audiences. First came Einarr's "experiment" in pagan poetics, which draws together a host of obscure references from other skalds' work—but which does not allude to any of the major mythological narratives that we know from the *Poetic Edda*. When the unknown poet-compiler of the *þulur* turned his attention to the names given to goddesses, he seems to have had *Øxarflokkr*—or a poem that was extremely similar to it—in his memory, if not in front of him. Snorri knew *Øxarflokkr* and quotes its component verses in *Skáldskaparmál*, but it is more likely that his treatment of Freyja is an elaboration of the names given in the *Ásynjur-heiti þulur*: the key diagnostic feature here is his appropriation of other goddess-names as Freyja-*heiti*. Snorri has been misled by (or has chosen deliberately to exploit) the proximity of these two groups of names in the *þulur*. Rather than carefully sifting out the true Freyja-*heiti* from the imposters, he has taken the opportunity to expand the mythological lexicon and to indulge in his cherished folk-etymological games at the same time.

We have no information about the origins of the *þulur* that the manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* preserve. There is, however, a further correspondence between the *þulur* and the figure of Einarr Skúlason. In a single post-medieval redaction of *Snorra Edda*, the *Laufás-Edda* text of Magnúss Ólafsson (Reykjavík, AM 743 4to, 1608–09), two stanzas of poetry attributed to Einarr are incorporated into the sequence of *þulur*.⁵⁶ These two *lausavísur* are, like *Øxarflokkr*, *dróttkvætt* catalogue-poems—this time, Einarr's subject is island-names, an example of which is found in each and every line. While none of the information in the island-stanzas counts as mythological, Einarr's proclivity for collecting and collating groups of names and assembling verses around them makes their attribution to him—though late—seem plausible. Einarr is the only poet named in even a remote connection to the *þulur* in manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*: it is intriguing to speculate that perhaps his efforts lie somewhere behind the anonymous *þulur*, too. There is ample evidence to suggest that the large-scale codification of poetic synonyms would have been a project that Einarr would have found congenial. His interest in these terms was in one sense academic, but it was also practical, as *Geisli* reveals Einarr to have an unusually well-developed repertoire of kennings for a skald of this period: a repertoire that includes occasional, selected examples that draw upon pagan traditions.

Indeed, *Geisli* itself preserves kennings that refer to two quite obscure pieces of mythological knowledge (as well as many that draw upon heroic-legendary material, something of a grey area in this context). In stanza 37, we meet a *gofug Hǫrn hvítungs* (noble Hǫrn of the drinking-horn [WOMAN]), which exploits Einarr's considerable knowledge of goddess names. A sword-kennung in stanza 48, meanwhile, uses the striking and rare circumlocution *gómssparri gylðis kindar* (gum-spar of the wolf's offspring).⁵⁷ Martin Chase identifies this kennung as a unique example that draws upon the story of the wolf Fenrir's binding that we know from *Snorra Edda*.⁵⁸ It is notable that Snorri uses the same word—*gómssparri*—that Einarr makes the base-word of his kennung (though it is a kennung in itself) in his prose. Nowhere else in Old Norse does the word *gómssparri* survive, and this is another likely instance of Snorri having some of Einarr's verse in mind as he composes an episode of *Gylfaginning*. It reads as though Snorri's story of Fenrir's capture serves as a gloss to Einarr's kennung, in the manner familiar to us from *Skáldskaparmál*:

Úlfrinn gapði ákafliga ok fekksk um mjök ok vildi bíta þá. Þeir skutu í munn honum sverði nokkvoru; nema hjóltin við neðra gómi, en efra gómi blóðrefill. Þat er gómssparri hans.⁵⁹

The wolf stretched its draws enormously and reacted violently and tried to bite them. They thrust into its mouth a certain sword; the hilt touches its lower gums and the point its upper ones. This is its gum-prop.⁶⁰

Gómssparri is so rare as to suggest that Snorri has borrowed Einarr's term directly to flesh out a story that is key to the narrative of *Gylfaginning* but which is another example of a narrative that is not preserved in full in the *Poetic Edda*. *Lokasenna* 38–39 is the only poetic source where the well-attested myth of Fenrir's binding is combined with a reference to Týr losing his hand (although *Lokasenna* does not mention the *gómssparri*). Some scholars have been tempted to view *Lokasenna* itself as being a late, synoptic poem, perhaps a product of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic renaissance, leading Simek to question whether the myths of Fenrir's binding and the loss of Týr's hand were ever actually linked in the pagan period.⁶¹ It is impossible to say as much but, as with the description of Freyja in the following chapter of *Gylfaginning*, the potential link between Einarr Skúlason and the *Edda* should give us pause when we try to understand Snorri's strategies for constructing mythological narrative. One of the methods of *Skáldskaparmál*—the construction of a mythic narrative to explain a reading in a skaldic stanza—seems to have bled over into *Gylfaginning*, in which (Eddic) poetry normally has an

authenticating function.

All the foregoing seems to support Guðrún Nordal's assertion that Einarr Skúlason had a "key role in the skaldic canon, in both a theoretical and historical context, as the great rejuvenator of skaldic verse in the twelfth century, and perhaps as the first scholar of the study of skaldic verse."⁶² Einarr was no mere academician, but a working skald who still operated in courtly milieus where his art form was an appreciated, high-status activity. He had to negotiate between his twin roles of priest and poet and his affiliation to both Christian and (originally) pagan cultural traditions. His extant verse displays a sophisticated knowledge of and a deep engagement with both facets of his poetic identity, as well as a usually successful ability to integrate them in the production of a masterpiece (*Geisli*), occasional poetry that includes bold experimentation with obscure meters (*Runhenda*), and a fondness for rather outré mythological knowledge (*Øxarflokkr*). He may have been an innovator in the production of mythological catalogue poems, too, of the type that Snorri may have drawn upon in the composition of parts of his *Edda*.

But for all his mythological knowledge, Einarr Skúlason was no pagan. He seems to have been collecting and collating kennings from the work of earlier skalds, but very rarely do we find likely sources for these kennings among surviving stanzas, since Einarr's taste seems to have run to the less common types, those whose narrative precipitates are obscure. Naturally, the rarer these references to pagan deities and myths, the greater the need for their preservation in a venue outside their original contexts. In *Øxarflokkr*, Einarr—like the poet of the *Ásynjur-heiti þulur*—places a premium on rare and unusual information about Freyja. Like a lepidopterist catching and pinning the scarcest and most exquisite butterflies to a board, Einarr is a collector who preserves pagan traditions, in effect, by means of a sort of cultural taxidermy. The Freyja-heiti and kennings that he mounts and displays in *Øxarflokkr* were probably never very widespread, and by Einarr's time they were probably an endangered species. In Einarr's hands, these references become specimens. They are no longer part of a living poetical ecosystem, having lost much of their natural habitat. If they owe their survival in any form to the activities of collectors like Einarr and the *þulur*-poet(s) (assuming these figures are not one and the same), we owe our understanding of these Freyja-heiti and kenning-types to Snorri Sturluson, whose prose narrative in *Gylfaginning* functions, if I may be allowed the analogy, like a museum—or perhaps a zoo—for almost defunct mythological references. It is Snorri who provides a narrative environment into which these poetic figures can be placed. It is Snorri who explains what these references mean, where they come from, how they might be interpreted. But the pagan

culture of *Gylfaginning* is an artificial environment, created to provide life support to the myths but certainly not identical with the world that originally produced the myths. It is a convincing simulacrum of the real thing that contains many authentic features, but it allows us only highly mediated access to a mythology that has been created from, around, and for the myths that Snorri inherited from pagan tradition and the works of earlier poets.

The relationships that I perceive between the poetry of Einarr Skúlason, the *þulur*, and the mythography of *Gylfaginning* have two important methodological implications. First, they suggest that the statistical approaches of de Vries and Fidjestøl can tell us nothing much of use about the persistence of paganism in post-conversion Iceland. By rejecting the kennings of *Øxarflokk* from their database on the grounds that it is an imitative technical exercise, both scholars reveal that they have missed an important point: *any* use of pagan kennings or *heiti* in twelfth- or thirteenth-century skaldic verse should be regarded, *a priori*, as an academic exercise. Christian skalds were able to maintain an ironic distance between themselves and the pagan idiom in which they sometimes chose to compose, as Einarr's example amply demonstrates. If *Øxarflokk* needs to be cast into the outer darkness for its inauthenticity, why should a reference in one of the same poet's other works—like the *Hörn hvítings* of *Geisli* 37, for example—be eligible for inclusion in this type of statistical survey? The skaldic renaissance—in which Einarr seems to have played a leading and influential role—was not a “revival of heathenism.” To interpret the changing distribution of pagan kennings and *heiti* in verse of this period as unconscious reflexes of prevailing trends in the Icelanders' religiosity is to view the topic in an inappropriately Odinic mode: with only one eye open.

The second conclusion that I draw from this investigation also suggests that students of mythography should pause before relying on *Snorra Edda* for information about the goddess Freyja. The intertextual connections between *Skáldskaparmál*—where *Øxarflokk* is preserved—the *þulur*, and *Gylfaginning* place us in a hermeneutic bind when it comes to Freyja. Hardly any of the details in Snorri's detailed exposition of Freyja's identities can be “authenticated” in verse outside of the *Øxarflokk*/*þulur* nexus. Yet the information from Einarr's poem and the *Ásynjur-heiti þulur* can only be interpreted by recourse to *Gylfaginning*. Snorri's prose gives us a notionally pagan mythological narrative for which the only extant source—and therefore the only means of authenticating the prose account—is a couple of poems preserved in the *Edda* itself: texts that contain mythological information that we understand and indeed perceive as mythological only because Snorri presents it to us as such. The

numerous hypostases and attributes of Freyja that Snorri provides may very well be aspects of ancient traditions connected with the goddess—but who knows? The same could also be said of the reference to Fenrir’s *gómsparri* in *Gylfaginning*, which can be sourced either to *Geisli* or nowhere, and which otherwise lacks any “authentication.” In their present state, these nuggets of mythological lore lack any sort of context in either Eddic or skaldic poetry of the pre-Christian era, while Snorri’s learned (and perhaps ironic) folk-etymologizing is to the fore. While it is likely that Einarr had some older sources from which to draw his Freyja-*heiti* and gold-kennings, they do not persist—leaving us with the unusual situation of a twelfth-century priest appearing to stand at the head of a whole (if limited) mythological tradition. The curious case of Einarr Skúlason’s intimate knowledge of the Norse goddess of love illustrates that intertextual relationships between literary products of the skaldic renaissance—in both verse and prose—may have had a significant impact on the production of *Gylfaginning*—and thus on our understanding of the mythology as a whole.

SKÁLDSKAPARMÁL AS A TOOL FOR COMPOSITION OF PSEUDONYMOUS SKALDIC POETRY

Mikael Males

BACKGROUND

The extensive use of *Skáldskaparmál* for the composition of late medieval and post-Reformational *rímur* is well attested.¹ The type of poetry actually treated in *Skáldskaparmál*, though, is skaldic. For that poetic tradition, the treatise is generally construed as a receiver and an epitome. Indeed it was, however the skaldic tradition did not end there; *Skáldskaparmál* was composed at a time when the prosimetrical form was becoming a stylistic ideal in secular, historical narrative. In this article, I will survey indications in Old Norse texts that *Skáldskaparmál* was used as a tool for producing prosimetrical narrative suitable to the new taste. I will focus particularly on the saga writers' composition of poetry that purports to be the work of early skalds, and thus on the creation of an imposing literary past. Because prosimetrical narrative was a popular form for both kings' sagas and family sagas, examples will be drawn from both.

Skaldic stanzas in historical narrative fill two principal functions: one dramatic, the other corroborative. The early, oral tradition seems often to have lacked the kind of dramatic stanzas suitable to the narrative of the family sagas, and in many cases it appears that the saga authors took it upon themselves to invent the stanzas. Such stanzas are typically introduced by words like “þá kvað X” (then X proclaimed). Poetic quotations in kings' sagas, however, are more often corroborative, the skald serving as witness of truth rather than as part of the plot. Such quotations are typically introduced by words like “sem X segir” (as X says). The cases that cannot be clearly designated as dramatic or corroborative are rare enough to be considered exceptions. It seems that perceived authenticity was a prerequisite only in corroborative quotations.² Questions about authenticity were probably not asked about dramatic quotations, nor would they be seen as meaningful.³

That said, efforts at imbuing verse with some elements of historical credibility can be discerned. To put it in words that would have been understood at the time: if corroborative quotations belonged to *historia* (narrative about true things), dramatic quotations belonged to

argumentum (narrative about likely things) rather than to *fabula* (narrative about the fantastic).⁴ This influential distinction may not have been consciously applied by the saga authors, but nonetheless, the archaizing tendencies in poetical quotations outlined below bespeak such a framework: old poets were expected to compose in an old-fashioned way. I will give a brief general overview of indications to this effect, before moving on to the ones involving *Skáldskaparmál*.

COMPOSING OLD POETRY

Eddic poetry seems to have been perceived as more archaic than skaldic and thus most suitable for quotation in *fornaldarsögur* (sagas of Icelandic prehistory), as well as in Snorri's own *Gylfaginning*.⁵ This sense of chronology that informed the choice between eddic and skaldic verse also appears to have made saga authors cognizant of varying degrees of archaism within skaldic verse. Here, I provide examples of stylistic efforts to imbue pseudonymous skaldic poetry with chronological propriety.⁶

Ragnarr loðbrók and his family, protagonists of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, belonged to the earliest skalds according to both redactions of *Skáldatal*.⁷ As one might expect, the poetry of Ragnarr and his family in the saga exhibits archaic traits. It is composed in a kind of lax *dróttkvætt* with occasional hendings (rhymes), a feature which is generally considered archaic by modern scholars. Irregular hendings are common, for instance, in Bragi. Thus the first stanza of Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* (hendings italicized):

Vilið Hrafnketill heyra,
hvé hreingróit steini
Þrúðar skalk ok þengil
þjófs ilja blað leyfa.⁸

Will you, Hrafnketill, hear how I praise the king and Þrúðr's thief's
[HRUNGNI'R'S] foot-soles' leaf [THE SHIELD], grown with bright color.

The distribution of hendings deviates considerably from what one would normally expect. Thus, instead of *skothending* in odd lines and *aðalhending* in even, here odd lines lack hending, line 2 has *aðalhending* and line 4 has *skothending*.

The general tendency in Bragi's poetry is one of rising hierarchy, so that the hendings of even lines are either more or as prominent as those in odd lines, but almost never less prominent. In *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, however, this principle is not observed, and a couplet may look like this:

Vilkat boð fyr bróður
né baugum mey kaupa.⁹

I will not [hear] offers for my brother, nor buy the maiden with rings.

Such breaks to the hierarchic principle are very rare in, for instance, Bragi and Torf-Einarr, but occur seventeen times in the poetry of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (some instances may be debatable, but the overall trend is clear).¹⁰ This seems to indicate an attempt at archaizing performed by a somewhat misguided poet. No one has, to my knowledge, suggested that the poetry of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* might be any earlier than the twelfth century, and I would contend that it is a product of the prosimetrical ideal in the thirteenth.¹¹

Another conspicuous feature of the poetry in this saga is the use of expletive *of*, seven times in all.¹² Expletive *of* can be defined as the use of the preposition *of/um* as a pleonastic particle before a verb and, in some (presumably early) instances, a noun, as in Kormákr, *Lausavísa* 49: “hefʃk á holm *of* gengit” (I have gone to the duel); or in Bragi, *Ragnarsdrápa* 3: “harma Erps *of* barmar” (Erpr’s brothers [avenged] their grief). It is common in eddic poetry, but considerably less so in skaldic. To the extent that it occurs there, it is typical of early skaldic poetry.¹³

To judge by the poetry in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Kormáks saga*, this observation does not originate in modern times. In stanzas 69–71 of *Kormáks saga*, expletive *of* is used twice per stanza: nine times as often as in the remainder of the poetry in the saga and twelve times as often as in the saga’s other poetry by Kormákr. The group of stanzas is thus highly atypical and seems to have been composed in a burst of archaizing fervor. In light of the attempt at reproducing an early hending pattern in the poetry of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, it seems likely that the use of expletive *of* there is also an archaizing touch.

In *Kormáks saga*, the archaic ambitions betrayed in stanzas 69–71 resurface with other features in stanzas 77–79 and 82. These features are:

1. Onset or anacrusis—i.e., one or more syllables before the first stressed, alliterating syllable in even lines, as in Bragi, *Ragnarsdrápa* 9 (alliteration italicized):

svá lét ey, þótt etti
sem orrostu letti¹⁴

ever she feigned that she dissuaded [them] from battle,
though [in fact] she incited [them]

This feature is twenty-five times more common in these stanzas than in other poetry in the saga.

2. Irregular hendings, particularly in stanzas 78 and 82, which lack hendings in five lines. The typical stanza in the saga lacks or has irregular hendings in up to two lines.

Archaic features are common in *Kormáks saga*, but an incidence nine to twenty-five times higher than that of other poetry in the saga is hard to regard as natural; a conscious attempt to produce such features seems a more likely explanation. Because these stanzas occur in groups, it is also likely that each group was composed in a single, archaically minded poetic session.

Another valuable text for comparison is *Egils saga*.¹⁵ There, archaizing mainly takes the form of irregular hendings. In stanza 12 of the saga, the first half stanza is regular (apart from a doubtful hending in line 1), displays skaldic—i.e. intertwined—word order, and is attested elsewhere (in *Skáldskaparmál*).¹⁶ The second half, however, is unique to the saga. In it, odd lines lack hending, even lines have *skothending*, and the word order is straightforward. It is this part of the stanza that ties it to the prose:

Upp skulum órum sverðum,
ulfs tannlituðr, glitra,

eigum d ð at drýgja
í dalmiskunn fiska;
leiti upp til Lundar
lýða hvern sem bráðast,
gerum þar fyr sjöt sólar
seið ófagran vigrá.¹⁷

Wolf's tooth-stainer [WARRIOR], let our swords now glisten in the valley-fishes' [SNAKES'] mercy [SUMMER]. Let every man make his way to Lund as soon as possible. Let us make there, before the setting of the sun, the spears' frightful incantation [BATTLE].

Stanzas 13 and 14 follow a similar pattern of highly irregular hendings and simple word order, and stanza 13 is ascribed to an anonymous jarl's daughter. That anonymous stanza, tightly knit to the prose of the saga, is unlikely to have been transmitted orally for very long, and seeing that it deviates stylistically from the typical stanzas of the saga in the same way as the second half of stanza 12 and stanza 14, it is highly likely that the entire two and a half stanzas were composed for insertion into the saga. This example also shows that if older building blocks were available—in this case the first half of

stanza 12—they would be used in the construction of the prosimetrum.

A similar argument can be made with regard to stanzas 48–50, also displaying remarkably irregular hendings. The first half of stanza 48 consists of a general piece of advice on the reading of runes and is independently attested on a runic stick from Trondheim (ca. 1200), whereas the latter half ties the stanza to the narrative, and the following two stanzas are composed in the same deviant hending pattern. Three more stanzas in the saga are composed in this pattern, and can for different reasons all be attributed to the time of the composition of the saga.

As seen in these examples, an understanding of the features of archaic prosody was an asset in the composition of stanzas that allowed a verse to give an impression of, if not authenticity, then at least verisimilitude. Such observations are implicitly made in Snorri's *Háttatal*, where irregular hendings and onset belong to the metres of the early skalds (*fornskáld*),¹⁸ though these irregularities are obvious enough that many were probably aware of them independent of Snorri. As we have seen, there also seems to have been wide knowledge of expletive *of*, even though it is not commented upon in *Háttatal* or elsewhere in Old Norse literature. Whether or not *Háttatal* was used as a tool for composition in an “early” prosodical style remains uncertain, though such an application is quite possible. One almost-certain instance of its use with regard to skaldic diction is noted below.

Though the parameters are different, it is probably fair to say that the intricacies of skaldic diction are often considerably more difficult to master than the relatively simple prosodic features outlined above. To create a similar impression of chronological credibility in diction would thus be a more demanding task, and one might expect *Skáldskaparmál* to have been put to such use. Here, I will discuss some indications that this was indeed the case.

THE MEAD OF POETRY

In her 1981 article “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” Roberta Frank discusses how Snorri seems to have adapted the myth of the mead of poetry to his own ends.¹⁹ The article is both seminal and provocative. Frank focuses on how Snorri composed *Skáldskaparmál*, but several of her arguments also have bearing on the uses to which that work was put. I will not repeat all of her examples here, but I will briefly revisit the three that concern Snorri's description of the portion of mead that came out the rear end of Óðinn, who was at the time in the form of an eagle: the fool-poets' share. This part of the narrative in

Skáldskaparmál seems to have been invented by Snorri, but was later put to use in the kenning type “arnar leirr” (eagle’s mud [BAD POETRY]). I return to these kennings since I believe that the case can be further elaborated, and because one of them involves a stanza that is purportedly older than *Skáldskaparmál*.²⁰ Furthermore, they serve as background to the discussion of a kenning based on another portion of the same narrative, and one that Frank does not include in her article.

In an anonymous stanza in *Íslendinga saga*, the scornful kenning is turned against Snorri himself, composer of “eagle’s mud.”²¹ The phrase is clearly meant to identify Snorri—its owner, so to speak—and this shows that his contemporaries did not believe that all the kennings presented in *Skáldskaparmál* were traditional. The kenning works in tandem with a paraphrase of a *drápa* that Snorri composed in honor of earl Skúli. In the *drápa*, Snorri says that Skúli is “harðmúlaðr” (having a hard muzzle, i.e. he is hard, tough) against gold, meaning that he is generous. In the paraphrase, Skúli’s hard muzzle makes him an unpleasant kisser, not least, one may assume, for Snorri, who tried to kiss him with his poetry of praise. With sadistic elegance, both works—the *drápa* and *Skáldskaparmál*—are invoked to haunt their author. It should be noted, though, that whereas the *drápa* is quoted and commented upon in the prose, the reference to *Skáldskaparmál* passes without comment in either the stanza or in the prose. The biting irony in itself attests to the success of that work, at least within the Sturlung milieu of which the saga is a product, and thus within some of the circles whose use of *Skáldskaparmál* I here set out to analyze.²²

A second instance can be found in a poem from the fourteenth century—*Guðmundardrápa*, by Arngrímr Brandsson—wherein the kenning forms part of a topos of humility: “arnar leir hefig yðr at færa” (I have [only] eagle’s mud to bring you).²³

The third example is the phrase “ens gamla ara leirr” (the old eagle’s mud [BAD POETRY]) in a stanza ascribed to Þórarinn stuttfeldr, supposedly dating to around 1120 and thus antedating *Skáldskaparmál* by about a hundred years. The oldest manuscript and saga compilation in which it occurs is *Morkinskinna* (GKS 1009 fol., ca. 1275),²⁴ but it is also found in two manuscripts of *Heimskringla*—*Eirspennill* (Copenhagen, AM 47 fol., ca. 1300–1325)²⁵ and *Jöfraskinna* (ca. 1325, destroyed in the Copenhagen fire of 1728, early modern paper copies survive)—though not in *Kringla* (ca. 1258–1264, likewise destroyed in 1728 and surviving in paper copies).²⁶ Its absence in *Kringla* implies that it has been incorporated into the compilation during the second half of the thirteenth century or possibly somewhat later. It also appears in *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (Copenhagen, AM 66 fol., ca. 1350–75; GKS 1010 fol., ca. 1400–50),²⁷

dependent on Morkinskinna.²⁸ More importantly, it is a dramatic quotation, and thus not even contemporary readers can *a priori* be assumed to have expected it to be authentic. With these observations in mind, it seems most likely that the stanza is indeed inspired by *Skáldskaparmál*, as is borne out below. The example serves to underline that the dividing line between *historia* and *argumentum* in the case of skaldic poetry goes not between kings' sagas and family sagas, but between corroborative and dramatic quotations.

Frank's claim with regard to the use of *Skáldskaparmál* is probable enough as it stands, but can be further elaborated. For one thing, she maintains that the base-word *leirr* (mud) can hardly belong to a traditional kenning, since there are too few synonyms to allow for variation in oral tradition. The case may be slightly overstated; one could imagine the use of words like *drit*, *drítr*, *skítr*, *tað*, *dý*. The use of *sandr* in later kennings for poetry in *rímur*—as in “Hárs óðar sandr” (Hárr's [ÓÐINN'S] poetry's sand [POETRY]) and “mærdar sandr” (praise's sand [PRAISE-POETRY])—may hark back to *leirr*.²⁹ Nonetheless, it is remarkable that the base-word *leirr* seems to have acquired a somewhat canonical status in the three cases Frank mentions as well as in the four found in *rímur*.³⁰ The background to this status is probably to be found in the U-redaction of *Skáldskaparmál*.³¹ There one reads, after the description of Óðinn's rear discharge, the words “*ok heitir arnar leir*” (and that is called eagle's mud).³² Manuscripts A, B, and C lack the Mead of Poetry episode, and thus have no bearing on its original wording. R and W, on the other hand, are stemmatically related. The presence of the words “*ok heitir arnar leir*” in U is thus stemmatically equivalent to the lack of them in R and W, and the reference in *Íslendinga saga* makes it probable that earlier manuscripts contained the words in question, since they are meant to identify Snorri. If so, the canonical status of the base-word *leirr* would be dependent on a redaction of *Skáldskaparmál*.³³ Furthermore, there is no contesting Frank's assertion that the stability of the base-word is un-kenning-like and bears the marks of literary allusion.

One more feature of the kenning “eagle's mud” is equally remarkable and deviant. The referent is marked for quality—*bad* poetry—something that otherwise never occurs in kenning referents. Skaldic poetry is only comprehensible through structural conformity and the expectations that engenders; a one-off type of referent is more likely to have originated with a creative grammarian than through some more “natural” process.

In stanza 56 of *Egils saga*, another unique kenning concerns the mead returning up the front end of the eagle and can, I believe, be added to Frank's list. According to the saga, this is the first stanza in *Berudrápa* (*drápa* about a shield), a poem composed by Egill in

response to the gift of a shield sent to him by Þorsteinn Eiríksson. The kenning in question is “arnar kjapta qrð” (the eagle’s jaws’ [THE BEAK’S] seeds [VOMIT > POETRY]).³⁴ This kenning is the only one that I am aware of that refers to the eagle vomiting forth the mead of poetry—a story known only from *Skáldskaparmál*—and it seems likely that the kenning is derived from there. A late date of composition may also be indicated by the kenning “stalla vinr” (the altars’ friend [ÓÐINN]) in the first half of the stanza, also a unique type of kenning.³⁵ Whether the altar was perceived as a sacrificial altar or as a pedestal for a cultic statue, the reference may be derived from hagiographic literature, where the functions of cultic altars during late antiquity had become topoi. The influence of pre-Christian perceptions, however, cannot be conclusively ruled out.³⁶

The stanza is said to be the beginning of a *drápa*, which would normally place it more in the realm of *historia* than if it were identified as a *lausavísa*, though the quotation can hardly be called corroborative. It is striking, though, that Egill within the space of two chapters composes two *drápur* in thanks for shields (though shield-ekphrases are a recurrent feature in skaldic poetry).³⁷ The first, stanza 54 of the saga, is composed in thanks for a shield given to Egill by Einarr skálaglam, after Egill has overcome his initial impulse to kill him. It displays a rare pattern of hendings, lacking some hendings in odd-numbered lines (at least in lines 1 and 3), but compensating for this by connecting the last stressed syllable to the next line through rhyme, either to the hendings there or to another stressed syllable. The latter possibility, as in lines 1–2 below, is given in *Háttalykill inn forni* but disallowed in Snorri’s later elaboration in *Háttatal*.³⁸ Such interlinear compensation for lack of hendings in odd lines is otherwise most notably explored in the opening stanzas of Einarr skálaglam’s *Vellekla* (Einarr, if one may believe the saga, was a personal acquaintance of Egill’s).³⁹ I quote the stanza in normalized form, but with restrictive emendations:⁴⁰

Mál es lofs at lýsa
ljósgarð, es þák, barða,
mér kom heim at hendi
hoddsendis boð, enda;
skalat of grundar gilja
glaums misfengnir taumar,
hlýðið ér til orða
jarðgróins mér verða.⁴¹

It is time to praise the ship’s bright fence [SHIELD], which I have received. The treasure-sender’s [MAN’S] greetings have reached me. [unclear meaning]. Listen to [my] words!⁴²

All hendings are italicized, though there is some doubt about those in line 7: the line should probably be seen rather as lacking internal hendings and replacing them with a hending to the next line, as in lines 1 and 3. A pattern similar to the one in stanza 54 is displayed by stanzas 36 and 57 of the saga, and I have in another context argued that these three stanzas, or portions of them, may have been ascribed to Egill for a long time before the composition of the saga (Hans Kuhn has arrived at a similar conclusion regarding stanzas 36 and 54 of the saga).⁴³ If so, they have probably contributed to the irregular pattern of hendings in the stanzas composed for the saga, as well as the irregular pattern in *Egils hátttr* in Snorri's *Háttatal*. The bulk of the stanzas in *Egils saga*, which may also be considerably older than the saga, follow a regular pattern.

For all the legitimacy bestowed by the mention of a *drápa*, *Berudrápa*'s apparent use of *Skáldskaparmál* (and possibly of a Christian topos) indicates that it is inspired by the stanza in the preceding chapter, which has much to commend it as old.

BEYOND THE MEAD OF POETRY

The instances given above all refer to the narrative about the mead of poetry as told in *Skáldskaparmál*.⁴⁴ Though they are instructive of how that handbook was put to use, it would be somewhat remarkable if this was the only portion of it to leave traces behind. I hope to show below that it was not.

In *Sneglu-Halla þátttr* in *Morkinskinna*, the haughty royal poet Þjóðólfr Arnórsson is taunted by King Haraldr harðráði to compose a stanza about a street brawl between a tanner and a smith. When Þjóðólfr protests at the lowly theme, Haraldr tells him that the assignment is more difficult than he might think; he is to have the tanner be the giant Geirrþøðr and the smith be the god Þórr.⁴⁵ At the king's insistence, Þjóðólfr obeys and composes a stanza. He acquits himself well and the stanza is rightly famous, as is the next one, where the fight stands between Sigurðr and Fáfnir. Only the first stanza concerns us here, and I will render it according to its oldest reading, that of *Morkinskinna* (ca. 1275):

Varp or þretoþorpi
þórr smiþbelgia stórra
hvatt elldingom havlldnom
hafra kiqtz at iqtñi;
hlíoð greipom tok hvda
hravccvi scafls or afli
glapr við galldra smiþio

The great bellows' Þórr [THE SMITH] quickly threw the held thunderbolts [INSULTS] [cf. that Þórr threw a red hot rod/lump of iron at Geirrøðr. "Held" presumably because Þórr, with his iron gloves, could hold the hot piece of iron in his hand] at the goat-flesh's giant [THE TANNER] from the quarrel's hamlet [MOUTH]. With the sound-grips [EARS], the hide-scraper's (?) Geirrøðr [THE TANNER] happily received that incantations' smithy's [MOUTH'S] glowing iron rod/lump [INSULT] from the furnace [MOUTH].

A close translation can do no justice to the poetic qualities of the stanza. It may be noticed in passing that the stanza as it reads in Morkinskinna flies in the face of editorial stylistics; both the thunderbolts and the furnace (or possibly the glowing iron rod/lump) lack definers and function as pure metaphors understandable from the context, rather than as parts of kennings.⁴⁸ More important for the present purpose are the similarities between this stanza and Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa* 17. That stanza reads in R:

Sva at hraðskyndir handa
 hrapmǫnum fvalg gǫnar
 fýpti fylg alopti
 fio langvinr þrvngvar⁴⁹
 þa er avrþurfil eifv
 af hrímnis flo drofar
 til þramoðnil þrvðar
 þioft af greipar briosti.⁵⁰

So that the hasty battle-inciter [ÞÓRR], Freyja's old friend, swallowed the spark's snatched draught [GLOWING IRON ROD/LUMP] with his quick hands' mouths [PALMS], when the giant's woman's [GIANTESS'S] giant's (?) [GIANT'S] fire-beam [GLOWING IRON ROD/LUMP]⁵¹ flew fiercely at Þrúðr's desirer [ÞÓRR] from the grip's breast [PALM].

There are some similarities of vocabulary between the stanzas, such as *greip* (grip [of the hand]) and *sía* (glowing iron rod/lump; spark). Most striking, though, is the similarity in body imagery—the transposition of functions from one part of the body to another—compare “hljóðgreipar” (sound-grips [EARS]) in Þjóðólfr's stanza to “handa munnar” (hands' mouths [PALMS]) and “greipar brjóst” (grip's breast [PALM]) in *Þórsdrápa*. Such transposition is otherwise rare in the extreme.⁵² These factors, taken together, indicate influence from *Þórsdrápa* on Þjóðólfr's stanza, and this observation is not new.⁵³ The word *sía*, though, has more to add to the story. In *Þórsdrápa*, *sía* has its

ordinary meaning “spark” and qualifies *sylgr*, showing that it is a draught of a kind that has to do with sparks,⁵⁴ i.e. the glowing iron rod/lump. The rod/lump is in turn designated by “draught” because of the daring body imagery in the stanza, where the hand-mouths swallow it.

In Þjóðólfr’s stanza the situation is different. The referential web of this stanza is staggeringly complex, but on the level that can be called primary (insofar as it governs the syntax), *sía* must designate not a spark, but the glowing iron rod/lump itself.⁵⁵ This is true whether *sía* forms part of a kenning or not. In other words, as something that is thrown and caught—i.e. on the level of Þórr and Geirrøðr—*sía* means “glowing iron rod/lump.”

The inspiration for this use of *sía* is not to be found in *Þórsdrápa*. To judge by the three occurrences of *sía* in poetry and the nine in prose that I have been able to find,⁵⁶ the meaning “glowing iron rod/lump”—as opposed to “spark”—is only found in one other place, namely in the prose introduction to *Þórsdrápa* in *Skáldskaparmál*. Here, it occurs first as *járnsía* and then twice without prefix.⁵⁷ It would seem that Snorri has altered the meaning of the word to help the reader interpret a very inaccessible poem, since it is clear that this is not the meaning normally ascribed to this rare word even by him—he uses it three times in *Gylfaginning* meaning “spark.” The influence of *Þórsdrápa* on Þjóðólfr’s stanza thus includes the prose introduction to that poem, and the date of such influence must therefore be postponed by some 150–200 years.

I have mentioned above the words “ens gamla ara leirr” (the old eagle’s mud [BAD POETRY]) in a stanza ascribed to Þórarinn stuttfeldr and found in his *þáttir* in *Morkinskinna*. His and Þjóðólfr’s stanzas, inspired as they are by *Skáldskaparmál*, carry implications for *Morkinskinna* as a compilation, corroborating the older majority view that several of the *þættir* were interpolated after the original composition.⁵⁸ (It is not clear, though, that all or even most *þættir* in *Morkinskinna* share a common background.) Be that as it may, Þjóðólfr’s stanza supports Frank’s observation of the use of *Skáldskaparmál* to compose “old” poetry, and it seems that such use was not confined to the story of the mead of poetry.

Another product of this influence is perhaps less controversial, since it occurs in poetry that has already been suspected of being of later date. The poetry is, nonetheless, presented as early and is thus equally indicative of the uses to which *Skáldskaparmál* was put. The stanzas in question are ascribed to Grettir in his saga. The bulk of the stanzas in *Grettis saga* can in all probability be dated to the fourteenth century.⁵⁹ The linguistic evidence for this is unusually strong and is succinctly overviewed by Guðni Jónsson in his edition.⁶⁰

One marked feature of the stanzas in *Grettis saga* is the predilection for the figure *ofljóst*, by which the first referent of a kenning is not only a concept, but a specific word for that concept and the second and actual referent is a homonym for that word.⁶¹ Thus, for instance, “fjalla þinull” (the mountains’ string) yields “snake,” but not any word for snake, or a common one like *ormr*. Rather, one should arrive at the *heiti* for “snake,” *grettir*, in turn giving the name Grettir, the hero of the saga. The interest in such demanding wordplay seems to have increased with the rise of vernacular *grammatica* (linguistic and literary studies).⁶²

In the fourteenth century, the time of the composition of *Grettis saga*, grammatical interest is well attested in the manuscript record, particularly by the six copies of *Skáldskaparmál*, a large number in the Old Norse context.⁶³ In two stanzas in *Grettis saga* itself, two indications of grammatical interest—the use of the demanding figure *ofljóst* and the use of *Skáldskaparmál*—converge in kennings for the woman Þórbjörg. The kennings occur in the so-called *Ævikviða* of Grettir, in stanzas 40 and 42 of the saga.⁶⁴ The kennings are: “reynirunnr” (rowan tree) > Þórs björg (Þórr’s salvation) > Þórbjörg and “Sifjar vers beggja handa hjölp” (Sif’s husband’s [ÞÓRR’S] both hands’ help) > Þórs björg > Þórbjörg. These references are explained by a passage in *Skáldskaparmál*—and only there. Þórr is on his way to the encounter with Geirröðr and is nearly drowned when crossing a river, swelled with the urine of one of Geirröðr’s daughters (R-text):

Ok í því bili bar hann at landi ok fekk tekit reynirunn (T: runn; U: rísrunn) nokkvorn ok steig svá ór ánni. Því er þat orðtak haft, at reynir er björg Þórs.⁶⁵

And at that point he [Þórr] came close to land and got hold of a rowan tree [T: tree; U: bush] and thus climbed out of the river. Thence we have the saying that the rowan is the salvation of Þórr.

As a formula, “reynir er björg Þórs” (the rowan is the salvation of Þórr) is not very convincing, since it lacks poetic markers such as alliteration. It seems more probable that Snorri has extracted the “saying” from some poem now lost in a process similar to the one behind the words “þat er gómsparri hans” (that [the sword] is his gum-spar), added to the story concerning the pacification of the wolf Fenrir and obviously a quotation from Einarr Skúlason’s *Geisli* 48.⁶⁶ Alternatively, he may have simply invented the expression; Snorri is generally fond of etiology.⁶⁷ Even in the event that such a saying existed, the wording *reynirunnr* in both *Grettis saga* and R, particularly since it is juxtaposed to the words *Þórs björg*, bespeaks direct influence. The second kenning, on the other hand, simply presupposes

the story and the exact wording *Þórs björg*. These kennings, then, have in all likelihood been modeled on the prose in *Skáldskaparmál*.

Though this article primarily treats *Skáldskaparmál*, it should be noted that the Grettir poet was also influenced by another section of the *Edda*, namely *Háttatal*. In stanza 6 of that poem, Snorri gives examples of *nýgerving* (sustained metaphor), which he then explains in the commentary. In the stanza, the sword is called “sóknaðr” (snake of battle), and in the commentary Snorri clarifies that this snake “skríðr hugar stígu, þat er brjóst manna” (slithers along the paths of the mind, i.e. the breast of men).⁶⁸ Stanza 47 of *Grettis saga*, on the other hand, reads “vopnhríðar naðr varð fram skríða á benstíga” (the weapon-storm’s [BATTLE’S] snake [SWORD] had to *slither* forward on the wound-paths [WOUNDS]).⁶⁹ Not only is similar imagery used, but the same words reoccur: *naðr/naðra*, *skríða*, and *stígr*. Wording and imagery indicate that the poet has been influenced by both stanza and commentary, and this, together with the stanzas from *Ævikviða*, betrays him as an avid student of the *Edda*.⁷⁰

To return now to *Skáldskaparmál*, it would seem from the above that various material from the *Edda*—not only the section about the mead of poetry, but also the narratives of Þórr’s travel to and encounter with Geirrðr—has been a source of inspiration for the composition of poetry that purports to pre-date the prose that surrounds it. It becomes correspondingly more clear that *Skáldskaparmál* was indeed used—perhaps even widely used—for these purposes.

CONCLUSIONS: THE USEFULNESS OF SKÁLDSPAPARMÁL

The influence of *Skáldskaparmál* can be traced from quite early on through *Morkinskinna* and *Sturlunga saga*. It can also be discerned in *Egils saga*, in *Grettis saga*, and in *rímur*. It was consulted as a handbook for hundreds of years, but here I have studied it specifically as a tool for composition of “early” poetry, as one of the means of producing a literary past populated by poets with quick tongues and mythologizing minds.

Skáldskaparmál could, for this purpose, be used in three different ways:

1. The prose narratives could be used to form new kenning-types, as in *Ævikviða* and “eagle’s mud.”
2. Snorri’s commentary could function as an access to earlier poetry, so that phrases could be borrowed from the poetry with readymade interpretations found in the commentary, as in the case of the word *sía*.⁷¹

These two ways of using *Skáldskaparmál* can in principle be identified in cases where there is reason to believe that Snorri has made the stories up or embellished them, or when he slanted the interpretation of a stanza for his own purposes. In most cases, though, Snorri would have no reason to reinterpret stanzas and the kennings in them, and possible influence cannot then be verified. This is also the case with the final possible application:

3. *Skáldskaparmál* could be used as a collection of poetry. The stanzas in *Skáldskaparmál* are grouped after the kennings they contain and thus make up a useful catalogue for new composition.

This may well have been the most common application, but that is impossible to tell. It is likely that *Skáldskaparmál* was more widely used for composition of new—and not least new “old”—poetry, than can ever be demonstrated to be the case. Rather than trying to ascertain how common this practice might have been, I would point to a more general conclusion to be drawn from the indications discussed in this article: In an age and a place where vernacular grammatical interest was lively and when prosimetrical narrative was seen as a stylistic ideal, *Skáldskaparmál* was a powerful tool for creating the stanzas thought befitting to historical narrative. *Skáldskaparmál* was in all likelihood seen both as a literary achievement and as a key to the poetry of old and its mythological background. Saga authors need not have believed that Snorri got all the mythological details right, nor would it matter much; these were *fabulae*—lies and heathen misconceptions—that anyone was free to interpret as he saw fit. The modern devaluation of Snorri as a mythographer is based on demanding of him something he never set out to do, and asking questions that would not have been asked in his day.

On the other hand, *Skáldskaparmál* is full of learning and literary qualities, useful for both understanding and composing poetry. This is also the stated purpose of the work:

En þetta er nú at segja ungum skáldum, þeim er girnask at nema mál skáldskapar ok heyja sér orðfjqlða með fornum heitum eða girnask þeir at kunna skilja þat, er hulit er kveðit: þá skili hann þessa bók til fróðleiks ok skemmtunar. En ekki er at gleyma eða ósanna svá þessar frásagnir at taka ór skáldskapinum fornar kenningar, þær er hofuðskáld hafa sér líka látit.⁷²

But this one should tell the young skalds, who wish to learn the diction of poetry and acquire a vocabulary rich in old formulations, or else to understand that which is opaquely expressed: then, may

he internalize this book for learning and for pleasure. But one should not forget or disprove these tales by taking out of poetry old types of kennings that the canonical skalds found pleasing.

Snorri would not have been disappointed; as I have tried to show in this article, the usefulness which he saw in his own work corresponded to the uses to which it was later put.

HÁTTATAL STANZA 12 AND THE DIVINE LEGITIMATION OF KINGS

Kevin J. Wanner

SNORRI STURLUSON'S *HÁTTATAL*: PAIRED PRAISE OR PARTISAN PROCLAMATION?

Probably not long after returning from his first trip abroad to Norway in 1220, the Icelandic chieftain and newly appointed nobleman of the Norwegian court Snorri Sturluson (1178/9–1241) composed *Háttatal* (*List of Meters*).¹ This poem is both an epic panegyric for Jarl Skúli Bárðarson (ca. 1189–1240) and the teenaged King Hákon Hákonarson (1204–63), and a demonstration of metrical and other sorts of variation in skaldic verse. It would become, when joined with a commentary that elucidates the stylistic features of each of its 102 stanzas, the last of the four sections of Snorri's *Edda*, our fullest guide to pre-Christian Norse myth and poetry.²

Scholarship on *Háttatal* has tended to focus on its systemization of verse forms, and thus on its usefulness as a guide to producing and analyzing skaldic poetry. Relatively few have viewed the poem's praise of its patrons—which has often been characterized as stereotyped, hyperbolic, perfunctory, and the like—as worthy of sustained attention.³ Nevertheless, in the past few decades there have appeared several notable studies, including ones by Thomas Krömmelbein, Guðrún Nordal, and Heinz Klingenberg, that have emphasized the ideological aspects of *Háttatal*'s contents.⁴ These scholars have, along with others, observed that the balance of praise in *Háttatal* favors (in obvious and also less obvious ways) the jarl over the king. In quantitative matters, such as the number of stanzas dedicated to each patron and the distribution between them of laudatory appellations, *Háttatal* appears quite literally calculated to grant twice as much praise to Skúli as to Hákon.⁵ Klingenberg suggests that this was done as a kind of poetic correction to a power-sharing arrangement reached in 1217 that gave Skúli control over one-third of the country.⁶ In qualitative terms, it has been argued that while *Háttatal*'s accolades for the accomplished jarl are sincere, those which it extends to the immature king are often obscure, double-edged, and at times amount to mockery or scorn. As Guðrún Nordal puts it, "it is not only the unfavorable proportion of praise that is offered to Hákon that could have offended the young king, but also the difficulty in finding the praise in the first thirty stanzas."⁷ Thus, it has been

suggested that *Háttatal* be read not so much as an earnest dual encomium as a thinly veiled expression of political partisanship.

INTERPRETING *HÁTTATAL*'S "GOD STANZA"

It should be noted, however, that there is one seemingly significant type of praise that *Háttatal* extends only to Hákon. This is the claim that his authority is rooted in divine approbation. In other words, *Háttatal* supplies Hákon with charismatic legitimacy, with charisma being understood, as sociologist of religion Bryan R. Wilson following Max Weber defines it, "not [as] a personality attribute, but [as] a successful claim to power by virtue of supernatural ordination."⁸ Stanza 12 is where Snorri offers charismatic legitimation to the king:

Hákun veldr ok hǫlðum
(harðráðum guð jarðar
tiggja lér með tíri)
teitr þjóðkonungs heiti.
Vald á víðrar foldar
(vindræfurs jǫfurr gæfu
qðlingi skóp ungum)
qrlyndr skati gjǫrla.⁹

Happy Hákon possesses as well as subjects (God grants the hard-ruling prince land with glory) the name of people's king. Power over a wide land (the lord of the winds' roof created [or caused] grace for the young nobleman) the generous man has completely [or, alternatively, "clearly"].

While *Háttatal* 12 refers to no event or to persons other than God and Hákon, Snorri was surely aware of what had transpired between the king, the jarl, their respective supporters, and church leaders shortly before he visited Norway. As recounted, albeit long afterwards, by Snorri's nephew Sturla Þórðarson (1216–84) in his *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, Norway's archbishop and bishops resisted recognizing and supporting Hákon even after he had received the royal title and been acclaimed by several assemblies in 1217. To remedy this situation, Hákon and his backers agreed in the summer of 1218 that his mother Inga would undergo an ordeal of carrying hot iron to prove that Hákon was the illegitimate son of King Hákon Sverrison. According to Sturla, Inga passed with flying colors, and "the archbishop then gave notice about the ordeal ... and he placed a ban on any man, if he would place any doubt on [its outcome]."¹⁰ Thus, when Snorri arrived in Norway in the fall of 1218, the country's leading churchmen had recently ratified and now enforced with threat

of excommunication God's confirmation of Hákon's right to be king.

But while stanza 12 thus reflected current events, it sticks out from the rest of *Háttatal*. Krömmelbein has remarked that "in *Ht.* the only Christian element of the entire poem is found in Str. 12 ... With the exception of this single strophe (out of 102!) *Ht.* proves to be a decidedly 'heathen' poem."¹¹ If by "heathen," Krömmelbein means not only that *Háttatal* makes heavy use of pre-Christian symbols, terms, and motifs, but also that it evaluates its subjects according to such traditional measures as martial prowess and openhandedness, then the stanzas that surround the poem's mention of God amply substantiate his point. Before stanza 12 comes a string of the poem's blood-thirstiest stanzas—10 and 11 read in part: "the ruler defends the land with swords. Spears rip wounds apart ... Skull flies from the detached body ... Scalp lies sliced ... Men's friend provides the wolf with a very great deal of slaughter-beer. The warg does taste blood-drink from the wound and redden lips."¹² Immediately after its detour into Christian ideology, the poem returns to such warlike content: stanzas 13 and 14 contain the poem's only references to Hákon that employ heathen gods' names, calling him "Njǫrðr who uses the reddening-rod of shields" and "Týr who intensifies battle-play."¹³ Whether or not bookending *Háttatal*'s "God stanza" with mutilated corpses, blood-slurping wolves, and heathen gods offended the king's or his clerical supporters' sensibilities, such juxtapositions could have served to remind the poem's audience that there are more sources of glory than God, and more to being king than securing his earthly agents' endorsement.

Stanza 12 is more than just an anomaly in the context of *Háttatal*, however. It is the only place in all of the works ascribed to Snorri—among which I include for purposes of this discussion all portions of the *Edda* and *Heimskringla* (*Circles of the World*), a collection of sagas of Norway's kings often dated to ca. 1225–35—that seems to endorse the idea that a king's power flows from God. As Sverre Bagge observes: "[t]here is little trace in Snorri of the ecclesiastical and monarchical idea of the king holding an office on God's behalf," and Aron Gurevich similarly avers that "Providence, according to Snorri, is not in the least the foundation of the march of history.... The idea of destiny in [his] kings' sagas has little in common with the theory of world-governance by the Creator's supreme will."¹⁴

Certain questions about *Háttatal* 12 are raised once we accept such conclusions about the stance of Snorri's body of work on matters of royal legitimation: Why did Snorri include a nod to the notion of "kingship by God's grace" in this one place in his poem and oeuvre? And why—once he had opted to employ the concept of charismatic legitimation of monarchical authority in his panegyric—did he not

exploit it to greater effect? Scholars have commented, after all, on the pitfalls of praising an inexperienced king using the warlike imagery and ascriptions of military prowess that all but saturate the portion of *Háttatal* dedicated to Hákon.¹⁵ Trumpeting the king's divine election seems as if it could have provided a means to offset the martial accomplishments of Skúli; the theme could have been used to fill a number of stanzas while avoiding the complications introduced by efforts to laud Hákon as a warrior or leader of armies. It is a motif that can bear repeating without threatening to slip, to trade on a familiar phrase from *Heimskringla*'s prologue, from praise into mockery.¹⁶

The scholars who have recently called attention to *Háttatal*'s politics reach a consensus of sorts on these questions. Their analyses suggest that Snorri used the ideology of kingship by God's grace because he had little choice but to do so, but that he had little enthusiasm for or investment in the claim. Krömmelbein, although he says nothing about stanza 12 apart from remarking on its incongruousness, implies that it is out of step with what he sees as *Háttatal*'s main aim, which was to represent its patrons' reigns as the culmination of a legendary and mythical history grounded more in native than Christian traditions.¹⁷ For her part, Guðrún Nordal acknowledges that while Snorri praises Skúli "unconditionally" and effusively, he never speaks of the jarl's *gæfa*.¹⁸ That he does so for Hákon she ascribes to the fact that "the divine luck of kings was of course a common notion in the Middle Ages."¹⁹ As for Klingenberg, he suggests that Hákon's identification as a recipient of *Gottesgnadentum*—divine right—marks one instance in the poem where "the necessary difference in rank" between its subjects is recognized and upheld. He further observes that "Htk. 12 reads like a paraphrase" of an inscription from the backside of a coin from Hákon's reign that reads: "SIGILLVM HACONIS MAGNI DEI GRACIA REGIS NORWEGIE."²⁰ These scholars, then, treat stanza 12 as an unavoidable but also rather token—perhaps even grudging or insincere—affirmation of a key component of contemporary royal and ecclesiastical propaganda, one that Snorri found it necessary to incorporate into the portion of *Háttatal* devoted to the king, even if it contributed little to his poem's intended message.

There is much that seems right about the prevailing view of *Háttatal* 12.²¹ Evidence, moreover, can be adduced from Snorri's biography to support the view that he was disinclined to advocate or abet efforts by the church to expand and fortify its influence in northern politics. For example, in 1190, when Snorri was around eleven years old and being raised and educated at his foster home at Oddi, a directive was issued by an archbishop of Norway that forbade the ordination of *goðar*, or chieftains, in Iceland.²² This ban seems to

have been effective, since there is no later record of an Icelandic *goði* entering the priesthood.²³ Snorri was thus part of the first generation of chieftains' sons for whom the possibility of joint religious and secular rule was foreclosed, and his investments and labors, both political and literary, would remain markedly focused on the latter sphere.²⁴ Snorri also had before him in his youth the example of his foster father Jón Loptsson's resistance to Bishop Þórlakr Þórhallsson's efforts to exert influence over chieftains' private and public affairs. Snorri was himself among the *goðar* who raided the bishop's seat at Hólar in 1209 in protest against Bishop Guðmundr Árason's promotion of ideals of Gregorian reform in Icelandic society and politics.²⁵

A potential shortcoming, however, of the reigning perspective on *Háttatal* 12 is that in explaining the poet's use of the topos of kingship by God's grace in terms of obligation and reluctance, it paints him as a rather reactive figure. Given that Snorri has been perceived in this instance as a passive transmitter of and perhaps a resister to a claim that served others' interests, little effort has been made to consider what purposes of his own could have been served by stanza 12. The question, then, that I address in the remainder of this essay is: what point was Snorri trying to make by employing this topos in the way and to the extent that he did? In other words, what ideological work can stanza 12 be understood to have performed for the poet?

DESIDERATA OF POWER AND CRITERIA OF LEGITIMACY IN *HÁTTATAL*

Scholars' opinion that *Háttatal*'s content is unoriginal is certainly justified. This judgment ought at once to be joined, however, by the observation that such originality is not the goal of this discourse of praise (just as it is not of most such discourses). Rather, this discourse's goal is to attest—in ways that others will be persuaded by or at least assent to—that its subjects are exemplary, in the literal sense of instantiating a type: in the present case, that of the praiseworthy ruler.

While probably the first things that a praiseworthy ruler must be acknowledged to possess are legitimate claims to power and position, I will postpone discussion of these and first describe briefly what I will label the desiderata of power that figure in *Háttatal*. These are qualities and accomplishments that, while they were not strictly speaking needed to rule, were expected of praiseworthy Scandinavian rulers. Or, from a slightly different angle, they were the things that rulers expected to hear themselves praised for.

The most prominent desiderata of power in *Háttatal* will not surprise anyone familiar with the corpus of skaldic praise poetry: Theodor Möbius lists them as “generosity and hospitality, a warlike

spirit and seaworthiness.”²⁶ A stanza from near the end of the poem that lauds both Hákon and Skúli lists these qualities, as Bjarne Fidjestøl put it, “i eit nateskal”: “I know of young lords who give gold, brandish swords, and ready warships.”²⁷ Other desiderata mentioned in *Háttatal* are wisdom or cleverness, concern for justice and peace, and having the favor of men and a multitude of friends and followers.²⁸ Snorri also sometimes simply asserts his patrons’ general praiseworthiness and already circulating renown.²⁹

As mentioned above, many have remarked on the greater number, intensity, and specificity of the qualities and accomplishments assigned to the jarl as opposed to the king. Be this as it may, the point I wish to make here is simply that *Háttatal*’s desiderata of power are, without exception, ascribed to both the king and jarl. While the praise given Hákon is certainly not equal to or identical with that accorded to Skúli, the poem names no desideratum that one has but the other lacks. If, then, Snorri’s poem proposes any defining difference between its patrons and their ranks, we must look for this to emerge from its criteria of legitimacy.

In his book on *Heimskringla*, Bagge observes that:

Snorri rarely comments on the legitimacy of the claims [of rulers or would-be rulers].... Conflicts [in his sagas] are not usually decided on the basis of the legitimacy of the claims that are brought forward, nor does Snorri often refer to detailed discussions of such claims. Still, it would be wrong to dismiss them as mere pretexts for ruthless power politics. A sort of basic legitimacy seems to be a necessary condition for playing the game at all. As this condition is normally satisfied, Snorri does not comment very much upon it.... Legitimacy thus serves as a sort of “entrance ticket” to the game. When this condition is satisfied, there is no question of degrees of legitimacy; then intelligence, arms, and the ability to attract followers settle the issue.³⁰

The sagas that Bagge characterizes are set mostly in a time when multiple kingship was the norm—when, that is, all male heirs of a king (sons but also close relations like brothers or half-brothers) could hold legitimate and non-exclusive claim to his title. In Norway’s history, multiple kings ruled simultaneously not infrequently (though seldom peacefully). By the early thirteenth century, however, the ideal of unitary kingship had largely won the day in Norway, in no small part owing to its championing by the church, especially since the establishment of an archbishop’s seat in Niðaróss in 1152 or 1153.³¹ While the issue between Hákon and Skúli would ultimately be settled by “intelligence, arms, and the ability to attract followers”—that is, by their respective desiderata of power—at the time of Snorri’s visit in

1218–20 the distinction between the two men and their ranks was being made on the grounds of legitimacy. We should therefore expect to find in *Háttatal* different measures or standards of legitimacy at play.

The criterion of legitimacy that appears most frequently in *Háttatal* is birthright. Both rulers' kinship with kings is highlighted. Hákon is called *ættstuðill skylja* (king's family-pillar) and *tiggja sonr* (king's son), and Snorri affirms that the land over which Hákon reigns is "that which ... his father had to rule before—the court remembers him still."³² As for Skúli, he is three times called "the king's brother," referring to his relationship to Hákon's predecessor Ingi Bárðarson, who died in 1214.³³ Klingenberg has also shown how *Háttatal*'s use of honorifics derived from the names of the second set of nine sons of King Hálfðan gamli (the old) is relevant to claims of legitimacy based in lineage. In *Skáldskaparmál* (*The Language of Poetry*), —the portion of the *Edda* focusing on skaldic diction and placed before *Háttatal*—Snorri describes a first set of nine sons of Hálfðan, who "became so excellent in warfare that ... their names are used as honorifics [*tignarnöfn*] just as a king's name or a jarl's name. They had no children and all fell in battles."³⁴ Each of Hálfðan's second set of nine sons, however, is progenitor of a noble lineage to which he gives his name. Yet their names, too, serve, Snorri says, as general *tignarnöfn* in poetry. Klingenberg shows that *Háttatal* applies honorifics derived from the first set of sons to Hákon and Skúli in a ratio of 1:2, but from the second in a ratio of 1:1. He argues that by equalizing distribution of the titles that "implied the idea of membership in legendary noble lineages ... Snorri seems diplomatically to evade the virulent problems of descent and legitimacy" that swirled around the pair.³⁵ In other words, when it comes to kinship and ancestry, *Háttatal* affirms that both rulers possess what Bagge calls "basic legitimacy."

While I find Klingenberg's argument that *Háttatal* avoids privileging either of its patrons' descent-based claims convincing, I do not agree that the poem ultimately avoids taking a stand on the question of legitimacy, i.e., of who had the right to be king. Yet the only other criterion of legitimacy apparent in *Háttatal* is the bestowal of titles and positions by higher authorities. In Skúli's case, stanza 39 attests that he received a *jarldómr* from a king, his brother Ingi. As for Hákon, stanza 12 suggests that he received his title of *þjóðkonungr*, "people's king," from God. I see little reason not to take stanza 12's expression of charismatic legitimation at face value—in other words, not to assume that the poet meant what he said, or at least that he meant for the stanza to be taken to mean what it said. It has seemed obvious to many, however, from both the contents of *Háttatal* and what is known of its composer's life, that Snorri personally and politically favored

Skúli. We therefore find the poet in the awkward position of disagreeing, more or less openly, with God's judgment about who is the more worthy man. In the remainder of this essay, I consider how Snorri was able to adopt and sustain such a position. As a first step, I examine the word used in *Háttatal* 12 to label the property of divine election, along with related terms.

GRACE: KINGSHIP'S *SINE QUA NON*?

When I quoted Möbius above on the qualities that skalds tend to ascribe to those whom they praise, I cut him short. His list reads in full: "generosity and hospitality, a warlike spirit and seaworthiness, to which also still is joined luck (*gæfa*, *gipt*, or *happ*)."³⁶ Here and in his glossary for *Háttatal*, Möbius treats these terms as synonyms, translating each as *Glück*. He takes them to refer to the fortunate outcomes that ought to mark any praiseworthy noble's career. More to the point, he regards them as a desideratum of power, rather than as a criterion of legitimacy.

I propose to understand these terms differently, at least as they are used in *Háttatal*. *Happ* is the only one of the three to be used more than once, or to be applied to both Hákon and Skúli. Three times it appears in the plural and in connection with Skúli: "who achieves the greater *hopp*? ... [Skúli] has the more evident *hopp*"; "the prince causes *hopp* to flourish."³⁷ It last occurs in a stanza that offers another epitome of the desirable qualities of both the king and jarl: "those rulers are all-wisest, most dangerous to rings, boldest in spirit, meanest to gold things, most eager for battle, most gracious to the court, nearest to *happ*."³⁸ In each of these instances, *happ* seems to be used in the way that Möbius understood it, to refer to the rulers' enjoyment of success or good fortune. *Happ* refers, in short, to a happy happenstance.³⁹

Unlike *happ*, *gæfa* and *gipt* occur only once each in the poem, and then only in association with the king. The former term appears in stanza 12, which states that God *skóp gæfu ungum þóðlingi* (created or caused *gæfa* for the young nobleman). The latter occurs in *Háttatal* 1: *gramr á gipt at fremri* (the ruler has the greater *gipt*).⁴⁰ I wish to suggest that these terms are used in *Háttatal* in a way that conforms to the Weberian notion of charisma as defined by Wilson in the quotation provided near the outset of this essay. That is to say, Snorri seems to me to use *gæfa* and *gipt* to refer to a supernatural gift or blessing, i.e., a form of grace. Needless to say, I do not intend to argue for how these terms were used by speakers and writers of Old Norse in general. Nor will I take into account most of the vast body of scholarship on these and related terms such as *gipta*, *hamingja*, *auðna*,

and *heill*, much of which has tried to determine whether or not these words are of pre-Christian origin, as well as whether, when, and in what ways it makes sense to talk of “sacral kingship” among Scandinavians or Germans. The results of some of this scholarship might be of aid, however, in pinning down what these terms mean in *Háttatal*.

One view that seems to be common is that *gæfa* and related terms do not refer to a quality specific or exclusive to kings. To quote a scholar who was much preoccupied with these matters: “these terms in no way have a firm connection to kingship. Among kings—as among all men—some have luck, some do not.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, in *Háttatal*, *gæfa* is assigned only to the king, and it is one of very few properties ascribed by the poem to Hákon or Skúli that permits a line of demarcation to be drawn between them. It is also the only such property that can be defined as a criterion of legitimacy rather than as a desideratum of power—as, that is, a property that qualifies its possessor to hold an office rather than one that simply tends to accompany holders of an office.

A question on which there is less consensus is whether *gæfa* and related terms refer to “an indwelling, inborn quality, emanating from the individual,” or to something that comes to a person from an outside, supernatural or superhuman source.⁴² In *Háttatal*, it seems clear that the latter conception is at work. Unlike those stanzas that speak of Skúli generating or increasing *happ*—and thus reckon this property among his accomplishments—the initiative and credit in stanza 12 both lie with God: he is the source of the *gæfa* that is “bestowed” on Hákon.⁴³ The same dynamic is evident in the stanza’s other statement about this relationship: *guð lér jarðar tiggja* (God grants or lends land to the prince). As Krömmelbein remarks, here “the land, over which King Hákon rules, is represented as God’s fief.”⁴⁴ As I argue in the last section of this essay, representing God as the agent and Hákon as the patient in these exchanges is fully consonant with normative Christian notions of the nature and operation of grace.

The case for understanding *gipt* in *Háttatal* as also signaling charisma is more tentative. Yet even though stanza 1 does not mention God, the term *gipt* by itself can be regarded as having a charismatic valence. Peter Hallberg has argued that, in prose sources at least:

The word *gipt* has ... unlike *gipta*,... *auðna*, *gæfa* and *hamingja* ... become a kind of *terminus technicus* precisely for Christian blessing or inspiration.... That we have got ... a specific word for the gift of heavenly blessing and religious inspiration, may well be regarded as an indication that there was a certain need for it, and that *gipta*,

gæfa, *hamingja* could not do the same service—because they had in themselves if not an irretrievably heathen character, then a completely profane one.⁴⁵

In ways, Hallberg's distinction seems too stark. For one thing, the quotation's last part is contradicted by how *gæfa* is used in *Háttatal* 12, though the explicit connection here of the term with God could be argued to remove it from the sphere of the "completely profane." *Gípt* also does not always seem as unequivocal a term for spiritual gifts as Hallberg contends. For example, the *Edda*'s *Formáli* or prologue states of those who forgot their creator after the Flood that "nonetheless God gave them earthly *gíptir*," and of people who dwell in "the world's middle" that they were "most honored with all *gíptum*, with wisdom and strength, with beauty and knowledge of all kinds."⁴⁶ While both of these sets of gifts can be taken to stem from God (but then, according to any reasonably developed sense of Providence, what does not?), they are clearly described as having this-worldly value and use.

Occurrences of *gípt* in a later poem may cast light on its use in *Háttatal*. Four decades after Snorri lauded Hákon, the same king was praised by the poet's nephew Sturla. Shortly after Hákon died in 1263, Sturla recounted the king's consecration in 1247: "that *gípt* came by good fortune [*góðu heilli*] upon Hákon from God's son, when the leading man of powerful Christianity [Cardinal William of Sabina] consecrated the mighty ruler ... at the Pope's bidding."⁴⁷ Here, *gípt* is used in much the same way as *gæfa* is in *Háttatal* 12, to refer to God's grace bestowed on the king, though Sturla acknowledges, as Snorri does not, the role of churchmen as mediators of this charisma. Sturla also, however, connects *gípt* with Skúli, stating that when the now-duke appropriated the title of king in 1239 "the changeable *gípt* of mankind turned fortune's wheel on him."⁴⁸ While *gípt* seems, then, not simply to mean "divine grace" to Sturla, nevertheless it is said in his poem to attend the legitimate king but to abandon the illegitimate one.

A last thing to note about *gípt* in *Háttatal* is that it is practically the only property ascribed to Hákon in comparative form, and the only one that he is said to have in a comparative or superlative sense that Skúli is not assigned an equal or greater share in. That is, while Skúli is repeatedly said to be or to have more or the most of some desirable quality, and a few climactic stanzas describe both patrons as "the best" in respect to this or that attribute, *gípt* is the only thing that Hákon alone is said to hold in greater quantity or intensity.⁴⁹ If *Háttatal* indeed uses this word to refer to grace or charisma, then we find in its first stanza as in its twelfth an acknowledgment of Hákon's possession of the property that makes the difference between a king

and other men.

PUTTING GOD IN PARENTHESES

Wolfgang Lange has observed that in the verse of the earliest Christian court poets a reference to God and his gifts usually amounted to a “parenthetical cliché” and served “more or less as a bonus and a concession to the spirit of the time and the wish of the patron.”⁵⁰ This is similar to how scholars characterize *Háttatal*’s use of this topos. Yet by Snorri’s time, God and Providence had begun to be incorporated in more substantial ways into praise poetry, as witnessed in Einarr Skúlason’s *Geisli* (*Sunbeam*)—composed in the mid-twelfth century in honor of Norway’s king and patron saint Óláfr Haraldsson (d. 1030)—or in *Nóregs konungatal* (*List of Norway’s Kings*), an encomium for Jón Loptsson that some have speculated was the product of a young Snorri. The latter poem ends with a prayer for God’s blessings for its subject that, as Lange himself affirms, is no mere “cliché in the [poem’s] outskirts.”⁵¹ In *Háttatal*, however, God remains relegated to parentheses. Attention is even called to this treatment of him, as I will now argue, in the poem’s commentary.

According to the commentary, *Háttatal* 12 is the fourth of a set of stanzas demonstrating “syntactical variation,” that is, ways of distributing sentences within a stanza or, more usually, a four-line half stanza, or *helmingr*.⁵² The set starts rather simply—stanza 9 has two sentences, stanza 10 one sentence per line, and stanza 11 one sentence per two consecutive lines. Stanza 12, however, illustrates a more complex structure called *stæltr* (inlaid), in which lines one and four of a *helmingr* are one sentence, while “the second and third lines form their own statement, and that is called a *stál* (inlay).”⁵³ Margaret Clunies Ross explains that use of this term “for intercalated clauses ... depends upon an analogy between the way in which a poet inserts a clause within or alongside another one and the way in which a metalworker ... inserts a thin decorative wire into the surface of a metal object.”⁵⁴ Use of such “intercalary or parenthetical clauses,” she notes, is common in skaldic verse of all types, and serves a variety of purposes, including “deepen[ing] the meaning of the main clause” or “allow[ing] the poet to introduce a comment in his own voice on a particular event or situation.”⁵⁵

Yet as Clunies Ross’s analogy suggests, a *stál*’s main purpose is ornamental. As such, it can complement or enhance (or, owing to irony or poor taste, clash with) the matter in which it is embedded. It will not, however, alter that matter’s basic function or essence. For a physical artifact like a sword, a decorative inlay may increase its prestige and value—i.e., how people subjectively respond to it—but

does not impact what it is or what it does objectively as a weapon. To explore the analogy's implications further, one may ask: why is one sword rather than another decorated? Or more abstractly, why has one chunk of matter received enhancement as opposed to another? The answer is that it is arbitrary: it just happened that this sword was chosen rather than those, or it came about as a result of a set of circumstances or series of events, i.e., owing to accidents. It makes little sense to think that something intrinsic to or inherent in the substance of the sword itself compelled or demanded that it receive special treatment.

The fact that God's grace can also be understood to act in this way may help to account for the choice to limit his and its appearances in *Háttatal* to parenthetical asides. To explain what I mean by this and to conclude my discussion, I turn to a text that may seem rather unrelated to our subject, namely Augustine of Hippo's *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* (*To Simplician on Diverse Questions*), written ca. 396. In doing so, I do not suggest that Snorri was or even could have been familiar with this text, or that it directly or indirectly influenced *Háttatal*'s composition. Rather, I am suggesting that since both authors shared in many respects a common set of theological presumptions, and since Augustine explicitly addresses questions that are relevant to—yet are unexamined in—*Háttatal*'s treatment of grace, then the bishop's text may illuminate the thought that went into Snorri's stanza.

Among Simplician's questions is one that Augustine often pondered: why does God bestow grace on only some humans, when all are equally guilty of sin and undeserving of mercy? Based on Bible passages like Romans 11:6 and Ephesians 2:8–9, Augustine avers that God's choice is unconditioned by any quality or act of the recipient, lest the creator's freedom be restricted or his eternity be compromised by one of his creatures.⁵⁶ He then argues that while this choice must appear arbitrary from the human perspective, it cannot be so in fact, since "there is no injustice with God."⁵⁷ Still, God's reasons remain "hidden from us.... I just cannot find what criterion to apply in deciding which men should be chosen to be saved by grace." Augustine cannot resist, however, offering criteria upon which he would base this decision: "if I were to reflect on how to weigh up this choice, I myself would instinctively choose those with better intelligence or less sins, or both; I should add, I suppose, a sound and proper education.... And as soon as I decide on that, He will laugh me to scorn."⁵⁸ Augustine's text ends with an extended consideration of the case of Israel's King Saul. His concern here is to preclude the conclusion that divinity is mutable from statements such as the one ascribed to God in 1 Samuel 15:11: "I regret having made Saul king."⁵⁹

Again, Augustine insists on distinguishing between human perception and divine reality: while God may appear to us to change his moods or mind, this is simply the temporal unfolding of his eternal will. Thus: “when he is said to regret, he intends that a particular thing not be as he had made it to be.”⁶⁰

Grace constitutes a minor theme in *Háttatal*, most of which testifies to, praises, and implicitly compares the innate qualities, inherited qualifications, and personal accomplishments of two men. Augustine’s theology of grace radically decouples the former from the latter: God’s gifts, he contends, do not depend upon a person’s merits or lack thereof. Augustine also insists that grace is alienable: unlike the rights, deeds, and essential characteristics that a person is born with or acquires—none of which can be erased or taken away—grace once given can be removed, and with it one’s election to salvation or kingship. Assuming that *Háttatal*’s poet operated with anything like an Augustinian notion of grace permits us to understand how he was able, discursively and perhaps also cognitively, to ascribe this property to Hákon, and thus affirm his legitimacy as king, while simultaneously performing an independent and—to all appearances—contradictory assessment of Hákon’s and Skúli’s relative merits. Like Augustine, Snorri had his own criteria, even if they were not the same as God’s. But if Snorri too perceived grace as alienable, then he could have hoped that God’s judgment, eternal in theory but temporal in its manifestations, would ultimately be shown to match his own. Indeed, if Snorri subscribed at all to the connection that *Háttatal* 12 makes between grace and kingship, then he must have convinced himself that this hope had become a reality—that God had, in fact, regretted making Hákon king—when he sided with Skúli in the rebellion that would cost both men their lives.⁶¹

CREATING TRADITION: THE USE OF SKALDIC VERSE IN OLD NORSE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Rolf Stavnem

A fundamental question for scholars working with skaldic poetry is—or at least should be—whether skaldic stanzas reflect the Viking Age (the time of their supposed origin) or the Middle Ages (when they were recorded in manuscripts). It is not only a question of whether stanzas fit into the traditional categories of *ægte* (authentic, composed by recognized Viking-Age skalds) or *uægte* (inauthentic, fabricated by medieval Icelanders and falsely attributed to Viking-Age skalds). Most of the skaldic corpus is preserved in the form of quotations in sagas or in rhetorical or grammatical treatises, which means that even if the verses are authentic, they have been removed from their original oral context and function, and edited into a prose context that will no doubt have a significant effect on their interpretation, from both medieval and modern perspectives.

Even if we were able to confirm that many stanzas in sagas and other medieval texts actually were composed in the Viking Age—and a substantial number of them probably were¹—we would still need to ask how much these verses have changed in the course of a long oral transmission. Were they available to saga authors in written form, or orally through informants? Were they handed down with explanatory anecdotes, the so-called *Begleitprosa*?² And last but not least: were medieval scholars even concerned with the authenticity of skaldic verse, or is this concern a post-medieval phenomenon? The full answer to these questions will probably remain obscure; however, a detailed examination of the interaction between saga prose and skaldic verse can increase our understanding of medieval attitudes toward skaldic verse and even give us an idea of the process by which skaldic stanzas were transmitted from their supposed original context to their quotation in saga prose.

For my analysis I have chosen stanzas dealing with the Battle of Svölör quoted in the sagas of the Norwegian King Óláfr Tryggvason (ca. 968–1000), a single stanza by Skúli Þorsteinsson, and a number of stanzas from the *drápa Rekstefja* by the skald Hallar-Steinn. The stanzas will be considered under the following headings: (1) the content of the stanza, (2) the narrative mode, (3) the prose context, (4) the poetical context, (5) the skald. A preliminary discussion of

stanzas in the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason will clarify the following analysis.

THE SAGAS OF ÓLÁFR TRYGGVASON

Toward the end of the year 1200 two biographies of the Norwegian King Óláfr Tryggvason were written in Latin by the monks, Oddr Munkr³ and Gunnlaugr Leifsson, both associated with the monastery of Þingeyrar in Northern Iceland. This is stated in a fragment: “sva segir brodir Oddr. er flest hefir komponat a latínv annar madr en Gvnnlavgr af Olafi konvngi” (thus says brother Oddr, who has composed more than anyone else in Latin about King Óláfr, apart from Gunnlaugr).⁴

Both works are now lost. Oddr’s text, however, survives in a translation that is preserved in three redactions known as *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* by Oddr Snorrason (hereafter *Óláfs saga Odds*), and they are thought to be fairly close to the original work,⁵ whereas Gunnlaugr’s text forms the basis of the compilation known as *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, although Gunnlaugr’s text no doubt has been edited and expanded to a degree that leaves very little of the original work.⁶

Obviously, it is difficult to form an exact idea of how close the original Latin biographies of Óláfr Tryggvason are to the later translations and redactions of them. Nevertheless, scholars agree that skaldic verse in Old Norse cannot have been a part of the original Latin composition, and the stanzas must have been worked into the text in the course of the translation process.⁷ Even though Oddr and Gunnlaugr did not quote skaldic verse in their texts,⁸ they were no doubt familiar with the verses of the skalds and were influenced by their testimonies: in other medieval sources, Gunnlaugr is said to be an expert in skaldic poetry.⁹

The absence of verse quotations in the earlier material on Óláfr Tryggvason is probably for the same reasons. Apparently the first to write about the king were the historians and learned Icelanders Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056–1133) and Ari Þorgilsson (1067–1148); unfortunately nothing is preserved from Sæmundr’s work and very little by Ari’s hand. Both *Óláfs saga Odds* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* include references to these two authorities, but there is nothing to indicate that they incorporated skaldic verse in their texts.

The earliest extant texts surveying the kings of Norway include *Historia Norwegie*, by an unknown author, written in Latin and dated 1160–75,¹⁰ and *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium*, written by Theodoricus also in Latin, dated 1180.¹¹ These works do not quote skaldic verse, either, although it is apparent that the authors knew

skaldic stanzas and possibly used them as sources for some of their accounts.¹²

The earliest extant historical account of the Norwegian kings in the vernacular is *Ágrip*, by an unknown author and dated to ca. 1190.¹³ *Ágrip* may also be the earliest known Old Norse text that combines skaldic verse with prose.¹⁴ Skaldic verse appears sporadically in the text, and of the total of seven skaldic citations, only two are full stanzas, both by the named skald Sigvatr.¹⁵ However, it seems plausible that the author drew on more skaldic material than he quotes.¹⁶ The complicated internal relations between these early synoptic histories have been discussed in detail by scholars like Theodore M. Andersson.¹⁷ For this analysis, it is relevant to note that all three synoptic histories mentioned above include brief accounts of Óláfr Tryggvason, and none of them quote skaldic verses in their accounts of him.

The sparse material in the synoptic histories cannot explain the long accounts of Óláfr Tryggvason in the subsequent sagas of Óláfr, and it is generally accepted that skaldic verse as well as oral tradition must have contributed a substantial portion of the vastly expanded material narrated in *Óláfs saga Odds* and supposedly also in the lost text by Gunnlaugr.¹⁸ It remains obscure whether the translators/editors of the two Latin biographies who expanded the narratives with skaldic stanzas had these from written records or oral informants. The style of *Óláfs saga Odds* does not mirror the style of later kings' sagas regarding the regular use of stanzas in course of the prose narrative, apart from the account of one event in the saga—the Battle of Svölðr—where thirteen stanzas are quoted. In the remainder of the saga, skaldic verse is non-existent, apart from a few *lausavísur*.

Fagrskinna is a compilation of Kings' Sagas thought to have been composed around 1220,¹⁹ but even though it succeeds *Óláfs saga Odds*, the relationship between these two texts is complicated with respect to the verses. *Fagrskinna*'s biography of Óláfr Tryggvason is much shorter than *Óláfs saga Odds* and lacks the quasi-sanctification of King Óláfr that is characteristic of this saga. Alison Finlay observes that “*Fagrskinna* relies almost exclusively on Oddr's saga as a source for its account of Óláfr Tryggvason, but all the fantastic elements and inflationary rhetoric are stripped away.”²⁰ The account of the Battle of Svölðr, however, follows the same course in *Fagrskinna* as in *Óláfs saga Odds*, especially regarding the use of verses.

Given that the verses in the extant versions of *Óláfs saga Odds* were not in the original Latin text, several scholars have found it likely that they entered the translations via *Fagrskinna*.²¹ This seems particularly plausible for the A version of *Óláfs saga Odds*, which contains a number of stanzas about Óláfr's youth by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld

also quoted in *Fagrskinna*, although these appear as an appendix on the last page of the manuscript. In general, the translations may well be so recent that the thirteenth-century *Fagrskinna* could be the source. On the other hand it also appears that *Óláfs saga Odds* was a source for *Fagrskinna*, possibly at a stage where *Óláfs saga Odds* still contained no verses.²² It has also been suggested that both *Fagrskinna* and the translations of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar Odds* go back to a lost translation.²³

Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson claims that the verses in *Fagrskinna* were taken from *Óláfs saga Odds*, because one stanza by Halldórr ókristni is placed in an awkward context in *Óláfs saga Odds*, and if the author had known *Fagrskinna*, he would have corrected his own account. Bjarne Fidjestøl rejects this suggestion, saying that the matter cannot be decided, and goes on to favor *Fagrskinna* as the source, because this explanation would be simpler.²⁴ However, it may be noted that if indeed the translations had their verses from *Fagrskinna*, then one would have expected the S version to have included the *Fagrskinna* stanzas by Hallfreðr that deal with Óláfr's youth.

A text that clearly draws on both *Óláfs saga Odds* and *Fagrskinna* is Snorri Sturluson's kings' saga compilation *Heimskringla* from about 1230.²⁵ The saga of Óláfr Tryggvason in *Heimskringla* is not as long as *Óláfs saga Odds* and much longer than the account in *Fagrskinna*—but most importantly for the present endeavor, a substantial number of verses have been added. Nevertheless, the account of the Battle of Svǫldr includes the same stock of verses as the translations of *Óláfs saga Odds* and *Fagrskinna*, which indicates that *Heimskringla* is heavily indebted to these two texts regarding the episode.

The latest medieval saga of Óláfr Tryggvason is *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* which, as mentioned above, is to some degree based on Gunnlaugr's lost Latin biography of King Óláfr, but compiled to its present state in the fourteenth century. The saga consists primarily of material from known written sources like *Óláfs saga Odds* and *Heimskringla* (plus interpolations from *Hallfreðar saga*).²⁶ The majority of the verses in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* are also known from older sources; the exceptions are a number of stanzas from Hallfreðr's *Erfidrápa*²⁷ and from three medieval *drápur*: *Rekstefja* by Hallar-Steinn, *Búadrápa* by Þorkell Gíslason, and *Jómsvíkingadrápa* by Bjarni Kolbeinsson. Of these, *Rekstefja* and *Jómsvíkingadrápa* survive also as complete *drápur* not accompanied by prose.²⁸

We have now dealt briefly with the extant medieval texts giving accounts of the life of Óláfr Tryggvason. This body of material will be treated as different manifestations of a multifaceted and to some extent historical tradition, and referred to as a whole as the *Óláfssögur*.

Skúli Þorsteinsson

The extant poetry by the Icelander Skúli Þorsteinsson totals five half-stanzas in *Snorra Edda* and one full stanza in the account of Óláfr Tryggvason's final battle at Svǫldr. This full stanza is quoted in all the prosimetric accounts of the battle and it will form the basis for the following discussion of how the relationship between verse and prose might be analyzed.

According to the sagas, the Battle of Svǫldr took place in the year 1000. King Óláfr was attacked by an overwhelming enemy force led by the Norwegian Earl Eiríkr, the Danish King Sveinn Tjúguskeggr (Sveinn Forkbeard), the Swedish King Óláfr Skotkonungr and Earl Sigvaldi of Jónsborg.²⁹ The *Ólafssögur* quote skalds on both sides of the struggling forces. Skúli served Earl Eiríkr in the battle and according to several sources he was a *stafnbúi* (forecastle-man) and among the first to enter Óláfr's ship, *Ormrinn langi* (the *Long Serpent*).

To achieve a full picture of the implications of Skúli's stanza, the first necessary step will be to take a close look at the stanza itself; the second, to determine the narrative mode of the stanza within the prose; the third, to compare the content of the stanza with the prose context; the fourth, to discuss the possible poetical context from which the stanza has been excerpted; and the final step will be to consider the stanza in view of the reputation of the skald.

The verse and surrounding prose is quoted in *Óláfs saga Odds*;³⁰ relevant variants are presented in brackets:

Ok þessir höfðingjar fjórir, tveir konungr ok tveir jarlar, þorðusk í móti Óláfi konungi. Ok er lítt Sigvaldi við getit orrostuna.

[S: Svá segir Skúli Þorsteinsson, A: En þó segir Skúli Þorsteinsson í flokki þeim er hann orti um orrostuna, at hann var þar:]

Fylgða ek Frísa dolgi,
fekk ek ungr þar er spjör sungu
nú fiðr ǫld at ek eldumk
aldrbót ok Sigvalda
þá er til móts við moeti
malmbings í dyn hjalma
sunnr fyr Svǫldrar munni
sárlauk roðinn þorum.

[S: Hann var þar í þeirri orrostu með Eiríki jarli.]

And these four chieftains, two kings and two earls, fought against King Óláfr. Not much is reported about Sigvaldi at the

battle.

[S: Thus says Skúli Þorsteinsson, A: But Skúli Þorsteinsson says in the flokkir that he composed on the battle that he was present:]

I followed the Frisians' enemy [EIRÍKR] and Sigvaldi, where spears sang; I got renown young—now people find I grow old—when we [I] bore the reddened wound-leek [SWORD] into the din of helmets [BATTLE] against the meeter of the metal-assembly [BATTLE > WARRIOR] south before the mouth of Svǫldr.³¹

[S: He was there in the battle with Eiríkr jarl.]

The Content of the Stanza

Skúli's verse apparently represents the voice of an old warrior looking back on the martial deeds of his youth and thereby recalling the fame he acquired. Scholars generally take the initial lines to mean that Skúli followed the earls Eiríkr and Sigvaldi; the narrator in *Óláfs saga Odds* (along with most modern editors) understands the kenning *Frísa dólgi* (the enemy of the Frisians) to refer to Earl Eiríkr, although the phrase could potentially be applied to many other Scandinavian Viking-Age rulers. The information on Sigvaldi is controversial, as Skúli was not Sigvaldi's retainer. Furthermore, we are told in most versions that Sigvaldi did not fight in the battle. His main role in the account is seemingly to trick Óláfr Tryggvason into the ambush. The second half of the verse is dominated by martial clichés, and the only information directly related to the battle is the specification of its location *sunnr fyr Svǫldrar munn*i (south of the [river-]mouth of Svǫldr), indicating that Svǫldr is a river and not an island, as most other sources have it.

Judging from the verse, Skúli is more interested in his own achievements than in the historical significance of the battle. Bjarne Fidjestøl remarks that his poetry cannot be considered praise poetry: "det er heile tida seg sjølv og sine eigne kampar skalden talar om, og lovkvad er det berre for så vidt som det inneheld sjølvros" (the skald speaks exclusively about himself and his own battles, and it is praise poetry only to the extent that it contains self-praise).³²

Narrative Mode

It has been observed many times that there are two distinct types of verse quotation in sagas. These may be termed dialogical and corroborative.³³ However, these notions are somewhat imprecise. There are plenty of situations in sagas in which verses are neither corroborative nor dialogical, e.g. verses spoken as soliloquies or verses communicated by ghosts or by the deceased in dreams. Furthermore,

the notion of corroborative verse has a modern bias. Indeed, everything indicates that the verses in *Konungasögur* should be understood as corroborative. However, they are also more than this, and instead of using a terminology that reduces the meaning and function of a verse, I prefer to classify the stanzas according to the more neutral idea of whether their function in the sagas is diegetic or extradiegetic.

The diegetic verses, produced by characters in the narrative, are integral to the story and are typical of *Íslendingasögur*, whereas the extradiegetic verses belong to the level of the narrator, i.e. outside the story, and are typical of the *Konungasögur*. It has been noted by Bjarni Einarsson that verses here termed extradiegetic are typically introduced by *svá segir x* / *sem x segir* (thus says x / as x says), with x representing the name of a skald not directly involved in the story, whereas the diegetic verses are typically introduced with the phrase *þá kvað hann* (then he said), where *hann* is referring to a character directly involved in the scene in question.³⁴ These two types of prose introduction may also indicate whether we are dealing with a *lausavísa* (situational poem) or a verse from a longer poem, although, as Russell Poole rightly argues, this distinction is far from easy to maintain.³⁵

The extradiegetic verses may be viewed as an alternative account of the events: the skald momentarily takes over the storytelling as he presents the story or parts of the story from a different perspective and in a different form; thus, to use concepts from narratology, the voice in Skúli's stanza is an overt extradiegetic narrator.³⁶

Prose Context

It is a scholarly commonplace that extradiegetic verses in sagas are quoted to support the authenticity of the story, and this view will not be challenged here. Obviously, the inclusion of an additional narrator (the skald) with a different perspective expressed in a poetic form radically different from the prose style will indicate that narrating a saga involves a choice of sources and perspectives which creates a sense of objectivity.

As argued above, Skúli's stanza presents to some extent a diverging view of the story. This is further complicated by the fact that the two versions of *Óláfs saga Odds* (his verse is not preserved in the U text) diverge in the way Skúli's stanza is presented. In the S text (with a similar wording in *Heimskringla* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*) the verse is quoted to confirm the passive role of Earl Sigvaldi, whereas the A text, with the help of the verse, claims that Earl Sigvaldi did indeed participate in the battle, in spite of the lack of information regarding his activities during it (there is a similar

wording in *Fagrskinna*). In view of the overall story, it is surprising that Skúli's stanza is quoted for its statement about Sigvaldi and his possible role in the battle, as Sigvaldi has already been portrayed as a coward and a Judas-like character.³⁷ However, all the subsequent *Ólafssögur* accept the relevance of the stanza and include it for similar reasons.

The Poetical Context

It is often stated in saga literature that extradiegetic verses were not originally part of the prosimetrical composition, but came from a purely poetic context. Skúli's stanza is an example of this, as the A text of *Óláfs saga Odds* (as well as *Fagrskinna*³⁸) says that it is from a *flokkr* about Svǫldr. It would have been common knowledge for a saga audience that skalds composed skaldic verse to record historical events like the Battle of Svǫldr and that they were commissioned to do so by rulers involved in the battles. The audience would also know that a skald could compose either a *drápa* or a *flokkr*: both poetic forms consisted of many stanzas without intervening prose and were ideally performed in a king's hall in the presence of the king and his retainers; the difference between the two is that a *drápa* has a refrain and is considered to be more elegant or noble. Hence, the typical verse in the *Konungasögur* is supposedly selected from a purely poetical context very different from a prose narrative; as mentioned above, it remains obscure whether the verses were actually preserved in such a context or already mixed with explanatory prose at the stage where saga authors originally worked the verses into the prose narrative. It is likely that the audience knew more about the skald's biography and literary production than is conveyed by the prose narration, and it is even possible that they were familiar with the poetical context—the *drápa* or the *flokkr* in question. That would explain why skalds and their works are rarely introduced by more than their names and then subsequently referred to as authorities and quoted in work after work throughout the skaldic corpus.

There are six surviving stanzas (including half-verses) by Skúli, of which five are thought to belong to the *flokkr* on the Battle of Svǫldr.³⁹ The evidence for the *flokkr* is the above-mentioned remark in the A text (and *Fagrskinna*). Apart from the single stanza by Skúli in the *Ólafssögur*, all verses by him are preserved in *Snorra Edda*.⁴⁰ Even to an audience unfamiliar with this particular *flokkr* in its original context, it would be fairly obvious that Skúli's verse is a personal poem by an aging warrior looking back on the martial deeds of his youth, rather than a typical encomium for a ruler. The amount of historical information in Skúli's verse is rather scant. However, that it seems to belong to a different context and to present a perspective different

from the narrator's could have strengthened its credibility to a medieval audience, as it seems unlikely that it was composed for the saga.⁴¹

The Skald

Quoting a stanza by a renowned skald implies association with his poetical practice as well as his reputation through personal achievements. The audience would probably be familiar with the main biographical details about the major skalds, and this information contributes to the meaning of sagas in which verses by major skalds are quoted. Obviously some are more famous than others, and Skúli no doubt should be categorized among the lesser-known skalds in comparison with one like Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld. Hallfreðr's poetry is quoted extensively in the *Ólafssögur*, as he served as Óláfr's personal skald, and furthermore, a whole saga (*Hallfreðar saga*) is devoted to his life story.⁴² Nevertheless, Skúli was the grandson of the great Egill Skallagrímsson, and he is mentioned as a prime witness to Óláfr Tryggvason's last battle. He is even reported to be among the first from the enemy force to enter the defeated King Óláfr's ship, and his impressions of this are summarized in *Óláfs saga Odds*.⁴³ It is a matter of speculation whether Skúli's reputation was greater than the extant material indicates.

The analysis of Skúli's verse is an attempt to show step-by-step the various implications of skaldic verse in saga prose. Skúli's stanza is claimed to be from a *flokkr* on the Battle of Svölðr by a skald involved in the battle, and according to several sagas, an eyewitness to the last whereabouts of Óláfr Tryggvason. The corroborative function of the verse is not unproblematic, though, as the verse is clearly quoted to yield information about Sigvaldi, who is rather unimportant in the battle, although he plays a part in the events leading up to it. Furthermore, this information contradicts the preceding claim that Earl Sigvaldi was absent from the battle. Also worth noting is that the various saga versions do not agree on the interpretation of the stanza, as some versions understand it as testimony that Sigvaldi was not present at the battle, whereas others take it as an indication that he indeed was.

ANALYSIS OF THE MEANING OF SKALDIC VERSE IN OLD NORSE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Hallar-Steinn

Let us now turn to Hallar-Steinn's *drápa Rekstefja*, a praise poem on Óláfr Tryggvason. The *drápa* consists of thirty-five stanzas and is recorded without intervening prose in *Bergsbók* (Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 1 fol.) alongside the so-called *Óláfsdrápa*

Tryggvasonar (falsely attributed to Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld),⁴⁴ Einarr Skúlason's *Geisli*, and the anonymous *Lilja*. Nothing is known of Hallar-Steinn's biography, and apart from *Rekstefja*, there remains of his poetry only a few stanzas from a love poem preserved in *Snorra-Edda*, as well as fragments of a poem in *Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar*.⁴⁵

Up to twenty-five stanzas from *Rekstefja* are worked into the prose of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, though the precise number of *Rekstefja*-stanzas varies across versions of the saga. A complicating factor of the interplay between *Rekstefja*-stanzas and saga prose is that the saga versions display a number of divergences in the transmission of *Rekstefja* (they are beyond the scope of this essay to discuss, but I plan to explore them in a coming article). The textual basis for the following analysis will be my recent edition of *Rekstefja*⁴⁶ and Ólafur Halldórsson's edition of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*.⁴⁷

The Content of the Stanzas

The twenty-five verses witnessed in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* are quite similar to the prose in content, and differ from the prose mainly in narrative style. They display neither any personal perspective nor any of the self-praise found in Skúli's verse, and they do not deviate radically from the standard portrayal of the king in the *Óláfs sögur*: they recount his virtues (generosity, fierceness in battle, strength, courage, etc.) and the major historical details (his upbringing in Russia, his Viking raids in the British Isles and other areas, his dealings with pagan cults, and his final battle at Svölðr). *Rekstefja* also deals with his rise to power in Norway (*Rekstefja* 7–8) and his Christianization of five countries (*Rekstefja* 10–11), but these stanzas are not quoted in the saga.

Five stanzas (*Rekstefja* 2–6) are about his early years in Russia and naval war expeditions to various countries. A single stanza deals with his missionary activities conducted with both brutality and religious zeal (*Rekstefja* 9); two stanzas his generosity and the good life he provides for his retainers (*Rekstefja* 12–13); one with his preference to be on his ship rather than staying inland (*Rekstefja* 14); nine stanzas with the Battle of Svölðr (*Rekstefja* 15–23); one stanza with his ability to juggle swords walking from oar to oar while the ship is at sea (*Rekstefja* 25); and three stanzas with an anecdote about two men betting on who is the fastest to climb a cliff: the first man to climb the cliff is unable to make his way back, and Óláfr comes to his rescue and carries him safely down again (*Rekstefja* 26–28). The other anecdote tells of Óláfr's trusted retainer Þorkell, who is curious to know why the king leaves the ship every night (*Rekstefja* 29–31). He decides to stay awake to find out but falls asleep. On his return, the king throws Þorkell overboard to teach him a good-humored lesson,

and semi-miraculously, the king sees to it that the water does no harm to Þorkell's cloak. Eventually, Óláfr allows Þorkell to follow him and witness how Óláfr meets angels of the Lord (*dróttins englar*) in a house. Of the *Rekstefja*-stanzas quoted in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, stanzas 9 and 31 are the only ones with a clear Christian bias.

Apart from the overview of Óláfr's various personal qualities and a few remarkable anecdotes, the dominant event is clearly the Battle of Svǫldr, narrated in nine stanzas. The three themes traditionally dealt with by the skalds when commenting on the Battle of Svǫldr are first, details concerning Óláfr Tryggvason's opponents, that is, their number and size of their fleets; second, colorful descriptions of the fierceness of the battle and the king's courage; and finally, the possible survival of King Óláfr. These themes are also found in *Rekstefja*, but only one half-stanza (*Rekstefja* 23), not quoted in any versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, mentions the possible survival of the king. The relevant statement is as follows, quoted in prosaic word order: engi kann enn lengi segja yppirunnum unnelds hegju hilmis (no one can still for a long time tell the lifting trees of wave-fire [GOLD > MEN] about the condition of the ruler).⁴⁸ It is striking that *Rekstefja* has so little to say about the king's mysterious disappearance compared to the long and detailed accounts in *Óláfs saga Odds* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*. The latter, for instance, culminates in five intense verses by Hallfreðr speculating on the king's possible escape and survival.⁴⁹

The verses dealing with the Battle of Svǫldr describe Óláfr's own fleet with his eleven ships (*Rekstefja* 15), say that he is fighting three opponents at the same time (*Rekstefja* 16). He defeats the Swedish king (*Rekstefja* 17) and the Danish king (*Rekstefja* 18–20), but eventually succumbs to the Norwegian jarl (*Rekstefja* 21–22), fighting to the bitter end from the poop-deck (*Rekstefja* 23). Only one episode in the *Rekstefja*-stanzas cannot be considered standard material in the *Ólafssögur*. Apart from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, it is only narrated in *Óláfs saga Odds*, and there only in the prose. The episode concerns the decisive strategy suggested by Þorkell hávi for defeating Óláfr Tryggvason on his otherwise unconquerable stronghold, the ship *Ormrinn langi*. The strategy is, according to the prose narratives, to load timber onto Óláfr's ship to make it tilt so the enemy forces can get on board. It is supposedly described in the first *helmingr* of *Rekstefja* 22; however, the meaning is far from clear.⁵⁰

Narrative Mode and Prose Context

Most verse quotations in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* are extradiegetic, and the *Rekstefja*-verses are no exception. They are quoted in the saga to support the authenticity of the story. For

example, *Rekstefja* 2 is introduced thus: “þessa getr i Rek stefiu er ort er vm Olaf Trygva son at hann fæddizt vpp iGórdum” (this is told in *Rekstefja* which was composed about Óláfr Tryggvason, that he was raised in Gardar).⁵¹

The most interesting comment on *Rekstefja* is when the narrator shares his considerations concerning the first men to attack *Ormrinn langi*:

Nu segir sva Snorri Sturluson ok flestir menn aðrir at Sveinn Dana konungr lagði fyrst með sitt lið at Orminum langa ok hínun stærstum skipum Olafs konungs. En Hallar steinn segir i Olafs drapu hinni tvi skeldu at Olafr sęnski hafi fyrr lagt til motz við Olaf Tryggva son.⁵²

Now Snorri Sturluson and most other men say that Sveinn, the Danish king, was first with his troops to attack *Ormrinn langi* and the largest ships of King Óláfr Tryggvason. But Hallar-Steinn says in the “double-shaken Óláfrs-drápa” that Óláfr the Swede was first to attack Óláfr Tryggvason.

The narrator here seems to quote *Rekstefja* specifically because it contradicts the story in earlier works, and he explicitly points to Snorri Sturluson, most likely with *Hemskringla* in mind, as well as “most other men” (*flestir menn aðrir*). This divergence is reiterated in the preface to *Rekstefja* 18.⁵³ The narrator settles the matter of the diverging story-lines by reordering the events as they are presented in the *drápa* in order to make them fit better into the saga.⁵⁴ Hence, the *Rekstefja*-stanzas concerning the Battle of Svölðr (*Rekstefja* 15–23) have the following order in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*: 15, 18, 19, 20 (first *helmingr*), 16 (second *helmingr*), 17, 16 (first *helmingr*), 20 (second *helmingr*), 21, 22, 23.⁵⁵ The changes in verse order are not only due to the above-mentioned divergence regarding the succession of armies attacking *Ormrinn langi*. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that skaldic poetry does not necessarily follow chronology. For example, *Rekstefja* 16 (first *helmingr*) introduces the event by giving a summary, whereas in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, the same verse functions as a conclusion to the king’s fight with the Danes and the Swedes, aligning it with the chronological approach of the prose. Although *Rekstefja*’s divergence does not disturb the traditional order of events, the discussion of sources in the saga yields an impression of a narrator concerned with historical accuracy as well as establishing *Rekstefja* as a source worth consulting.

Several phrases in the *Rekstefja*-stanzas echo the prose (or vice versa). Following the description of the allegedly decisive strategy of loading timber on Óláfr’s ship, the second *helmingr* of *Rekstefja* 22

continues (here, in prose word order):

ella mætti ættstórr Eirekr aldri vinna oflinn í dyn geira.

otherwise, the high-born Eirekr would never have been able to defeat the mighty snake in the din of spears.⁵⁶

This wording is relatively close to the phrase preceding the verse in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*:

Er þat mal manna at Ormrinn mundi eigi wnnín hafa uorþit nema með þessi at fór sem Þorkell hinn hævi hafði ráð til gefit.⁵⁷

People said that the serpent would never have been defeated had it not been for the plan which Þorkell hávi advised.

This wording is not explained by the direct influence of poetry on prose, because there is a very similar phrase in both versions of *Óláfs saga Odds* where the verse is not quoted. The phrase in the S version: “þat er þat mælt at at aldregi mundi Ormrinn unninn nema hann legði ráð til (it was said that never had the Ormrinn been defeated had he [e.g. Þorkell hávi] not given advice). There are several possible explanations for the similarity between the verse and *Óláfs saga Odds*. Both sources may be based on the same well-known anecdote, but it is also very likely that the verse is based on an early redaction of the saga.

The Poetical Context

It is rare that the original poetical context of verses quoted in *Konungasögur* is known, but this is fortuitously the case with *Reksteffja*. Obviously, the text in *Bergsbók* does not represent the original *drápa*, as *Bergsbók*'s version has been affected by the transmission process. This can be seen, for example, in several flawed rhymes. Nevertheless, the composition and content of verses are presumably similar to that of the original *drápa*.

Reksteffja is normally dated ca. 1200 and the argument supporting this supposition is that the *drápa* shows a clear continuity with classical praise poems. It has obvious similarities with Einarr Skulason's *Geisli*, composed for the dedication of the cathedral in Níðaróss in 1153,⁵⁸ which suggests that *Reksteffja* was inspired by *Geisli*.⁵⁹ The composition of the *drápa* follows the traditional pattern of a saint's *vita*: life, death, and miracles.⁶⁰ *Reksteffja* 2–14 comprise a summary of King Óláfr's life, recounting mostly his martial activities, but also his efforts to oppose paganism. *Reksteffja* 15–23 are about his presumed death at the Battle of Svölðr, and *Reksteffja* 25–31 deal with

remarkable and semi-miraculous events in the king's life. *Reksteffja* 1, 24, and 32–35 are largely metapoetic comments typical of skaldic poetry.

Given the hagiographical story-line in *Reksteffja*, we would expect accounts of miracles in the *slæmr*, the third section of the *drápa* (*Reksteffja* 25–31), and indeed, a few episodes have supernatural associations, e.g. the above-mentioned episode where the king mysteriously restores a cloak ruined by water (*Reksteffja* 30), as well as the king's nocturnal encounter with angels, who presumably afford a vision of the paradisaal pleasures awaiting him (*Reksteffja* 31).⁶¹

According to tradition, Óláfr Tryggvason did not perform any miracles,⁶² and this is reflected in the careful wording of *Reksteffja* 31, here quoted in prose word order: “[hann] vann bjartar jartegnir allra dāða í it fimta sinn” ([he] performed bright proofs of all [his] deeds for the fifth time).⁶³ Although the structure in *Reksteffja* is closer to the pattern of hagiographical narrative than the biographical pattern typical of the *Konungasögur*, where death is the logical conclusion to a biographical account, *Reksteffja* is quite restrained concerning indications of Óláfr's potential sainthood in comparison with e.g. *Óláfs saga Odds*, a text abundant with quasi-miraculous episodes.

In the closure of *Reksteffja* the skald expresses the hope that King Óláfr is enjoying eternal bliss in paradise (*Reksteffja* 33). However, his life as it is presented in the *drápa* does not particularly lead up to this conclusion; rather, *Reksteffja* in many ways displays the style of a traditional praise poem with emphasis on victories in battle, generosity toward retainers, and heroic courage and endurance in the concluding battle. The *drápa* is very likely an attempt to enhance the image of Óláfr Tryggvason as a saintly figure comparable to Óláfr Haraldsson, but the mindset reflected in the *drápa* is deeply rooted in the traditional praise poetry for warlords.

The Skald

Although there is no reason to doubt that Hallar-Steinn is the author of *Reksteffja*, his authorship is somewhat blurred in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, as Hallar-Steinn's name is not mentioned in association with the title *Reksteffja*.⁶⁴ However, Hallar-Steinn is associated with *Óláfs-drápa in tvískelfdu* (*The double-shaken Óláfsdrápa*), clearly an alternative title for *Reksteffja*, in the passage quoted above. The only direct source for his authorship is *Bergsbók*, where the complete *drápa* is prefaced as follows: “Reksteffja er Hallar Steinar orti um Olaf konung Tryggvason” (*Reksteffja*, which Hallar Steinar composed on King Óláfr Tryggvason).⁶⁵

The concluding verses of *Reksteffja* yield an impression of a strong Christian bias as well as firm roots in skaldic tradition. The voice of

Reksteffja 32–33 is the voice of a cleric. In *Reksteffja* 34–35, however, the skald's main concern is aesthetics: in *Reksteffja* 34 he expresses surprise at how few *drápur* have been composed in honor of the king and mentions Hallfreðr and Bjarni as his only forerunners (obviously, the skald has Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld in mind, whereas Bjarni's identity is obscure). In *Reksteffja* 35, he proudly points to the meter as the element that distinguishes his own *drápa*. However, there is no information on Hallar-Steinn's biography, and he may well have been unknown to a medieval audience; even the scribes are confused about this, as the version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* in *Flateyjarbók* consistently attributes *Reksteffja* to the lawman and skald Markús Skeggjason (d. 1107).

The opening verse stages the traditional bid for a hearing typical of poetry that is rooted in the preliterate period, and the direct appeal to the audience is reiterated in the *drápa*'s last verse, *Reksteffja* 35. Given the supposed date of composition, this might be purely conventional, and it is not unlikely that *Reksteffja* was composed in writing.⁶⁶

The medieval audience would probably have sensed that Hallar-Steinn was on a par with the narrator of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*, especially since the narrator mentions his authority as a historian and implies that it is inferior to Snorri Sturluson's. Nevertheless, Hallar-Steinn is quoted alongside verses by Skúli, Halldórr, and Hallfreðr, and apart from the narrator's discussion of sources quoted above,⁶⁷ there is nothing to indicate a difference in time of composition between *Reksteffja* and the poetry of skalds contemporary with Óláfr Tryggvason.⁶⁸

To sum up, *Reksteffja* is quoted in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* to support the authenticity of the story, even though the narrator deems it inferior to Snorri Sturluson as an authority. The *drápa* is quoted alongside verses by Viking-Age skalds, and nothing in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* states that Hallar-Steinn was not contemporary with King Óláfr Tryggvason, in spite of the fact that the composition of the complete *drápa* as well as the tone and content of the verses excluded from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* rule out that the *drápa* was much older than 1200. Yet, the audience would not have overlooked the lack of information on Hallar-Steinn as a historical figure, which is underlined by the fact that *Reksteffja* in *Flateyjarbók* is attributed to or confused with the authorship of Markús Skeggjason. The anonymity of the skald in itself, though, is not unusual: nothing is known, for example, of Halldórr ókristni (the non-Christian), although his nickname obviously suggests that he was from the Viking Age. The audience would also have noticed in the *Reksteffja*-verses the lack of any personal involvement by the skald suggesting a historical and retrospective bias.

I have discussed in this essay a single verse by Skúli Þorsteinsson and a *drápa* by Hallar-Steinn with the aim of exploring various aspects of skaldic verse quoted in saga prose. The point of the analysis is to show that although the verses by both skalds may be characterized as extradiegetic as well as corroborative, authenticating the story and potentially providing an alternative view of the story, they nevertheless display striking differences. Some of these differences are clarified by applying the same analytical criteria to the poetic material by the two skalds.

It is implied and often directly stated in sagas that extradiegetic verses have been selected from a poetical context significantly different from the prose context in sagas. This applies to Skúli's verse, as the saga narrator states (in some versions) that the verse is from a *flokk*, and the content indicates that the skald commemorates the martial deeds of his youth. Likewise, Hallar-Steinn's verses are from a *drápa* in praise of King Óláfr Tryggvason that is fully preserved in its presumably original poetical context. Both Skúli's verse and Hallar-Steinn's *drápa* are retrospective poems, yet there is a clear difference in perspective: Skúli focuses on himself as a young man, but Hallar-Steinn on the king, with no personal involvement.

The clear distance in time from the events described, which is apparent in the verses, is an indication that the verses are extradiegetic. Nevertheless, Skúli is a diegetic character: he is not only involved in the story but even claimed to be an eyewitness to the king's final battle. Hallar-Steinn, on the other hand, is an extradiegetic character discussed by the narrator because his *drápa* provides an alternative story line, which is eventually rejected by the narrator. Rather than being a skald among Viking-Age skalds, Hallar-Steinn's *drápa* is a parallel to the prose accounts of Snorri Sturluson and others.

The analysis of the two realizations of *Reksteffja*—one purely poetical and the other prosimetrical and fragmented—indicates that the context is decisive for the perception of *Reksteffja*. Its Christian bias, primarily expressed by the vita-like structure of the *drápa*, is far from evident in the selection of verses quoted in the saga. If the full *drápa* had not been preserved in *Bergsbók*, it is doubtful that the modern reader would easily realize the Christian bias of the *drápa*. As a direct consequence—given that Hallar-Steinn's verses are quoted alongside Viking-Age skalds to authenticate the story—it would likewise have been less transparent that Hallar-Steinn is a medieval and not a Viking-Age skald. How the medieval audience viewed Hallar-Steinn is not certain, but the learned saga authors would probably have been aware that Hallar-Steinn was not a Viking-Age

skald. However, this does not seem to detract from his credibility, as he appears to be regarded as a medieval authority.

The analysis of the two skalds and their work indicates that skaldic verse incorporated as extradiegetic material in saga prose is relatively remote from an original poetical context. A comparison of the poetical context—fully known in the case of Hallar-Steinn, almost lost in the case of Skúli—with the prose context in various sagas indicates that the original context and original intention are potentially obscured. A skald's intention could be transformed by creative saga authors to make the poetic material fit the story in the saga—in the case of *Reksteffja*, by eliminating the Christian intention, and, in the case of Skúli's verse, by interpreting it against its actual content or making it authenticate events contradictory to the story. The prosimetric form leaves great scope for creativity and certainly contributes to one of the hallmarks of saga style: the multiplicity of voices.

RATTUS RATTUS AS A BEAST OF BATTLE? STANZA 12 OF RAGNARS SAGA

Rory McTurk

The purpose of this essay is to offer, very tentatively, a new interpretation of one of the skaldic stanzas preserved in the text of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* found in the Copenhagen manuscript, Ny kongelig samling (NKS) 1824 b 4to—that is to say, in what has been called the Y redaction of *Ragnars saga*. This saga is preserved in two major redactions: the Y redaction just mentioned, preserved in NKS 1824 b 4to (ca.1400) and dating from the second half of the thirteenth century; and the so-called X redaction (from which Y is largely derived), preserved fragmentarily in Reykjavík, AM 147 4to (ca.1490), and dating from ca.1250.¹ The existence of a third redaction, older than either X or Y, may be deduced, arguably at least,² from the combined evidence of X and *Ragnarssona þáttr*, a mainly prose compilation preserved in the hand of Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334) in Copenhagen, AM 544 4to, which forms part of the early fourteenth-century codex *Hauksbók*, of which Haukr was the chief scribe.³

The younger of the two major redactions, Y, contains forty stanzas spoken by characters in the saga. Three of these stanzas are in the *fornyrðislag* metre; the remaining thirty-seven are in a somewhat loose form of *dróttkvætt*. Of these thirty-seven, seven are also preserved in *Hauksbók*, and traces of twenty-one of them (including five of the seven preserved in *Hauksbók*)⁴ can be discerned in the very poorly preserved, fragmentary text of the X redaction in AM 147 4to.⁵ The stanza to be discussed here, numbered 12 in Magnus Olsen's diplomatic edition of *Ragnars saga*, published in 1906–08, is not, however, preserved in *Hauksbók*, and there is no trace of it in what can now be read of the X redaction of *Ragnars saga* preserved in AM 147 4to. It must thus be regarded, for all practical purposes, as preserved only in NKS 1824 b, i.e. in the Y-redaction.⁶

The stanza in question is spoken by Eirekr, one of the two sons of Ragnarr loðbrók by his first wife, Þóra. It is the second of four stanzas spoken by Eirekr as he awaits death by impalement on spears at the hands of King Eysteinn of Sweden. Eirekr and his brother Agnarr had invaded Sweden, but were defeated by Eysteinn in a battle in which Agnarr fell. Eysteinn then offered Eirekr his life and his daughter in marriage, but Eirekr preferred, for heroic reasons, to die in the

manner just described. The text of the stanza may be transcribed from Copenhagen, NKS 1824 b 4to., fol. 64r, with italics indicating abbreviations:

Mvnað eíns *konungs* efní.
sva at ek víta dēní
a. dyra bed deyía.
til daugurðar hrafne.
mvn blodí þa brodur.
ok brat yfir gialla.
hriðr veggía slíta.
blar þo at illa leyní.⁷

The first half-stanza (lines 1–4) is relatively unproblematic. It may be normalized and translated as follows:

Munat eins konungs efni,
svá at ek vita dœmi,
á dýrra beð deyja
til dögurðar hrafni.

Not a single future king, as far as I know, will die on a more glorious bed in providing a raven's breakfast.

The reference here to a bed is to the spears which, in the prose immediately preceding this stanza, Eirekr had requested should be driven into the ground with their heads pointing upwards, thus forming the lethal bed onto which he wished to be lifted.⁸ The raven is of course one of the three beasts of battle—the other two being the eagle and the wolf—that are typically presented in Old Norse poetry as feeding off the bodies of the slain.⁹

Among previous editors of the second half-stanza, lines 5–8, Magnus Olsen, Finnur Jónsson, and Ernst A. Kock¹⁰ have proved the most influential. An indication of how they have treated and translated it may now be given, with their texts printed in normalized form and with italics indicating their emendations to the text of NKS 1824 b. It may be noted that Kock's text (as opposed to his interpretation of it, to be discussed below) differs from Finnur Jónsson's only in placing commas at the ends of lines 5 and 6:

Lines 5–8: Olsen, ed., *Völsunga saga*, 203–4:

Mun blóðþiðurr bráðir
ok brátt yfir gjalla
bræðra beggja slíta

blár, þótt illa launi.

The [dark] blue blood-capercaillie [i.e. raven] will tear the bodies [bráðir] of both brothers and soon shriek over [them], even though he [the raven] [thus] pays a poor reward.

Finnur Jónsson, *Skj* BII:254; cf. Kock, *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 2:132 (NN §1454):

Mun blóði þá bráðir
ok brátt yfir gjalla
bræðra beggja slíta
blár, þótt illa launi.

Finnur Jónsson: The black one [the raven] will then tear at the prey [bráðir] [consisting] of both brothers, and will soon clamor over their blood, even though that is a poor return.

Kock: [His] black blood brother [blóði, m.] [i.e. the brother of the raven of line 4] will then tear the bodies of both brothers and soon shriek over [them], even though he [the raven] [thus] pays a poor reward.

In support of his emendation to *blóðþiðurr* (blood-capercaillie), evidently suggested to him by Sophus Bugge through personal communication, Olsen adduces *blóðorri* (blood-grouse) and *blóðtrani* (blood-crane), both recorded elsewhere as kennings for “raven.” As an alternative presentation of the half-stanza Olsen suggests the reversal of *bráðir* and *bræðra* in its word order, and considers, only to reject as “mindre rimeligt” (less reasonable) the possibility of retaining the NKS 1824 b reading *Mun blóði þá* in the sense “the blood-brother [of the raven mentioned in the first half-stanza] will then ...” (with *blóði* [blood-brother] taken as a weak masculine noun in the nominative case). His idea of the raven paying a poor reward is influenced by the fourth and final stanza spoken by Eirekr, the stanza numbered 14 in Olsen’s edition of *Ragnars saga*, in which Eirekr seems to be saying that if a raven plucks out his eyes the bird will be paying him a poor reward for the prey with which, he, Eirekr, has provided it by slaying people in battle.¹¹ Olsen’s reading of the half-stanza is adopted by Eskeland, Örnólfur Thorsson, and Ebel,¹² in their editions of *Ragnars saga*.

Finnur Jónsson retains the NKS 1824 b reading *Mun blóði þá* but takes *blóði* as the dative singular of *blóð*, n. (blood), governed by *yfir* (over) functioning in line 6 as a preposition. He takes the adjective *blár* in line 8 as substantival: “the black one.” He also emends to *launi*

in line 8. Hence comes his translation into Danish, of which an English rendering is given above. It is not entirely clear what “that” in the clause “though that is a poor return” (*bótt illa launi*) is meant to refer to here,¹³ but it may be assumed that Finnur’s interpretation of the clause in question is much the same as that assumed by Olsen, i.e. that the raven’s exultant feeding on the bodies of these two brothers is a poor return for the prey with which they have provided it. Finnur’s text of the half-stanza is reproduced by Guðni Jónsson,¹⁴ who gives no indication, however, of how the passage is to be translated.

Kock also retains the reading *Mun blóði þá*, understanding it in the sense rejected by Olsen, i.e. as “the blood-brother [of the raven mentioned earlier] will then ...” (with *blóði* [blood-brother] taken as a weak masculine noun in the nominative). He agrees with Olsen rather than with Finnur in treating *yfir* (over [them]) in line 6 as adverbial, and in taking *blár* ([dark] blue, black) as an adjective used attributively (in this case with *blóði*). Like Olsen as well as Finnur, he emends to *launi* (pays a reward) in line 8.¹⁵ This emendation, adopted by all three editors and conveying the idea of the raven giving a (poor) reward, seems to give awkward sense here, even though it finds some support in the wording of stanza 14, as indicated above.

It is clear that for each of these three editors a considerable amount of emendation is necessary. In seeking to make sense of the half-stanza without the need for emendation we may look in the first instance at the form *hridr* found in line 7 as transcribed above from NKS 1824 b, and lending itself readily to normalization as *hríðr*. The word *hríðr* is found as a *heiti* (poetic appellation) for “ox” in the younger of the two groups of *þulur* (poetic lists) preserved in manuscripts of Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*, that is, in the group dating probably from the thirteenth century.¹⁶ It is listed as a masculine noun with the meaning “ox” in *Lexicon Poeticum*.¹⁷ Noting that *hridr* is followed in the manuscript by the form *veggja*, readily adjustable by normalization to *veggja* and recognizable as the genitive plural of *vegg*, m. (wall), we may suggest that what is present here is a two-word expression, *hríðr veggja* (ox of walls), having the structure of a kenning. Is this indeed a kenning, and if so, what is its referent?

An answer to this question may be found in a four-line stanza (or half-stanza) in *málahátt* preserved as part of the Old Norse poem referred to variously in vernacular sources as *Bjarkamál* (*The Speeches of Bjarki*) or *Bjarkamál in fornu* (*The Old Speeches of Bjarki*).¹⁸ The existence of two titles may suggest that both an older and a more recent version of *Bjarkamál* were known. Seven stanzas (or parts of stanzas) of this poem survive. The four-line passage in question is edited by Finnur Jónsson as the seventh and final numbered item under the heading of *Bjarkamál en fornu* in *Skj* AI:180–181, and *Skj*

BI:170–71. In both *Skj* AI and *Skj* BI the seven-part sequence is included among poems dated to the tenth century; in *Skj* BI, however, these four lines are enclosed in brackets and said to be “vistnok af et yngre Bjarkemål” (very possibly from a younger *Bjarkamál*).¹⁹ Margaret Clunies Ross, on the other hand, in her forthcoming edition of the stanzas in vol. 3 of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*—while acknowledging Klaus von See’s dating of the poem as a whole to the late twelfth century,²⁰ and noting that parts 4–6 appear to be of later date than the other parts (though no later than ca.1225)—does not exclude the possibility that those other parts, including the four lines in question, date from the tenth century.²¹ These lines may now be quoted (from *Skj* BI:171, though without the enclosing brackets) and translated:

Svá skalk hann kyrkja
sem enn kámleita
véli viðbjarnar
veggja aldinna.

Let me then strangle him as if he were the grime-colored betrayer
of the wood-bear of ancient walls.

In Magnús Ólafsson’s seventeenth-century arrangement of Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* (known as *Laufás Edda*) where this passage is preserved, it is cited as an example of kennings for animals and introduced thus: *svo stendur í Bjarkamálum* (thus it stands in *Bjarkamál*). After the citation, the prose text (here normalized) explains: *hér er mús kölluð viðbjörn veggja, enn kötturinn véli hennar* (here a mouse is called wood-bear of walls, and the cat its betrayer).²² This might suggest that in Eirekr’s stanza in *Ragnars saga* the expression *hríðr veggja* (ox of walls) is a kenning for a mouse or rat.²³

That a rat rather than a mouse is meant in the *Ragnars saga* stanza is suggested by the presence of the adjective *blár* ([dark] blue, black) in line 8. If the reading *hríðr veggja* in line 7 may be accepted as a kenning for “mouse” or “rat,” then *blár* may be taken as a strong adjective used attributively in the nominative singular with *hríðr*, m., and the phrase *blár hríðr veggja* (black ox of walls) may be seen as referring to a rat of the species *Rattus rattus*, i.e. the black rat, the only species of rat of which traces have been found in Scandinavia from before the mid-eighteenth century, some dating from as early as ca. A.D. 1000.²⁴

If this interpretation is to be accepted, it must be shown how it fits into the remainder of the half-stanza syntactically and semantically, preferably without the need for emendation. Leaving aside for the moment the concessive clause introduced by *þó* in the final line, we

may take *blár hríðr veggja* (a black rat) as the subject of the auxiliary verb *mun* (will, shall), used here with the infinitive *slíta*. The verb *slíta*, meaning essentially “to slit,” “to break,” or “to tear (apart)” is most often found with an accusative object, but can be used with a dative object, as *Lexicon Poeticum* shows, in the meaning “consume,” “use up” (Danish *forbruge*, *opbruge*) in both a literal and a metaphorical sense.²⁵ Its use with the dative in this meaning in a literal sense may be illustrated by stanza 19, lines 5–6, of *Þorfinnsdrápa*, a poem in which the eleventh-century poet Arnórr jarlaskáld commemorates the mainly Scottish victories of Þorfinnr Sigurðarson, earl of Orkney. The relevant lines, as edited and translated by Diana Whaley, may be quoted as follows:

Sleit fyr eyjar útan
allvaldr bláu tjaldi.

The mighty ruler wore to shreds the dark awnings out beyond the islands.²⁶

The use of *slíta* with the dative in comparable, metaphorical senses is illustrated in the anonymous eddic poem *Helreið Brynhildar* (*Brynhildr’s Ride to Hel*), preserved in the Codex Regius (ca.1275) and generally regarded as one of the later eddic poems, from the twelfth or thirteenth century.²⁷ In stanza 9 of this poem Brynhildr Buðladóttir, on her way to Hel after her suicide, tells a giantess how during her lifetime Óðinn had ordered one who knew no fear—i.e. Sigurðr Fáfnisbani—to awaken her—Brynhildr—by bringing an end to her sleep. Here, the verb *slíta* is used in the meaning “bring to an end” with dative *svefni* (sleep) as its object. In the final stanza (14) of the poem, moreover, she uses *slíta* to speak of how she and her beloved Sigurðr, parted in life, will be together now that they are both dead. They will live out, or live to the very end, their posthumous lives together:

Við scolom ocrum aldri slíta,
Sigurðr, saman—²⁸

Let us two live out our (after)lives, Sigurðr and I, together!

If we may take *slíta* in the *Ragnars saga* stanza as meaning “consume” in a literal sense, we may propose *blóði* in line 5, dative singular of *blóð*, n. (blood), as its object, and *blóði* as governing *bróður* (brother’s, MS *brodur*), the latter understood as a possessive genitive. We thus arrive at the phrase *slíta blóði bróður* (consume [my] brother’s blood). While understanding this predominantly in a literal sense, we

may perhaps allow it to carry a hint of the metaphorical as well, with *blóð* also conveying the sense of “life(-blood),” in this case the last traces of life in a dead body. To the sentence *blár hríðr veggja mun slíta blóði bróður* (a black rat will consume my brother’s blood), thus established, should now be added the co-ordinating phrase *ok brátt yfir gjalla* (and soon squeal over [it]), with *yfir* taken not as a preposition governing *blóði*, as Finnur Jónsson takes it, but as adverbial, meaning “thereover” (“over [it]”), as Olsen and Kock have it. The verb *gjalla*—of which “squeal” is given here as the translation most appropriate for the utterance of a rat—has the meanings of “to yell,” “to shout,” when used of a human utterance; “to shriek,” “to scream,” when used of birds of prey; and “to ring” or “to twang” when used of physical objects (such as a bowstring). Neither *Lexicon Poeticum* nor the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* yields any example of its being used with reference to the noise made by a mouse or rat. It is clear, however, from the latter dictionary,²⁹ as well as from Cleasby-Vigfusson³⁰ and Fritzner,³¹ that it was used in prose, at least, in the sense of “to bellow” when used of cattle. Its use here may thus be seen as consistent with the element of metaphor introduced by the word *hríðr* (ox), understood as the head-word in a kenning for “rat.”

It remains to consider the concessive clause introduced by *þó* in line 8. As appears above, the manuscript has *þó at illa leyni* (readily normalizable to *þó at illa leyni*) where *leyni* appears to be the third person, presumably singular, of the present subjunctive of *leyna* (to hide, to conceal). As noted above, Olsen, Finnur Jónsson, and Kock all emend here to *launi*, third person singular present subjunctive of *launa* (to [re]pay, to reward), justifying this with a somewhat complicated explanation involving reference to a subsequent stanza in *Ragnars saga*, as shown above. For these three editors, poetic license, the exigencies of meter, and the semantic context as each of them sees it, appear to justify the understanding here of *launa* in an absolute, intransitive, sense, in the sense of “to (pay a) reward” (the poverty of the reward being conveyed by the adverb *illa* [ill]) without the objects that the verb might be expected to have, both an accusative object (referring to the occasion for the reward) and a dative object (referring to the person rewarded). These are presumably to be understood by the listener or reader. But why should the same justification not be used here for the reading *leyni*, which does not involve emendation? The verb *leyna* (to conceal) might be expected to have a dative object referring to what is concealed and an accusative object referring to the person from whom it is concealed, but need not have either if the meaning is clear from the context, which the editors clearly believe is the case with objectless *launa*. With these considerations in mind, I suggest adopting here the reading *leyni* and

translating *pó at illa leyni* as (though it conceals [it] badly), with the first instance of “it” here referring to the rat (and/or the noise it is making) and the second to what it is doing, i.e. consuming the blood of a dead man. In other words, the rat in squealing loudly is unashamedly exulting in its nefarious activity.

The half-stanza may thus be set out, normalized, unemended, and with translation, as follows:

Mun blóði þá bróður
ok brátt yfir gjalla
hríðr veggja slíta
blár, pó at illa leyni.

Then the black ox of walls [i. e. a black rat] will consume [my] brother’s blood, and soon squeal over [it], even though it [thus] conceals badly [what it is doing].

There are several objections that might be raised to this editing of the passage. The most obvious one, perhaps, is that the rat is nowhere else recorded in Old Norse poetry, as far as I know, as a beast of battle presented as feeding off the bodies of the slain. The standard beasts of battle, as already noted, are the raven, the eagle, and the wolf. The mention of a rat in the half-stanza under discussion may however be explained as follows: in the prose preceding the sequence of four stanzas spoken by Eirekr it is told that Eirekr’s brother Agnarr fell in the battle against King Eysteinn in which Eirekr was ultimately defeated. The manner of Agnarr’s death is not specified, though it is stated that both brothers fought bravely and offered tough resistance. Eirekr then speaks the first of his four stanzas, the one numbered 11 in Olsen’s edition of *Ragnars saga*. Here he expresses the wish to be pierced by spears (*ok geirtré í gegnum / ... látið mik standa!* [let spearshafts run me through!]) and then goes on, in the prose that follows, to specify, as noted above, that the spears should be driven, point upwards, into the ground and that his body should be lifted onto the bed of spear-points thus formed.³² We are not told the fate of Agnarr’s body, but may reasonably assume that it lies on the battlefield, a prey to rats, in contrast to Eirekr’s body—which, raised on spears, will be out of the reach of such vermin but readily accessible to ravens—and that Eirekr is drawing attention to this contrast in his stanza, in the first half of which he refers to a raven, as shown above, and in the second, as suggested here, to a rat.

Two other possible objections might be, first, that *hríðr*, a word meaning “ox,” a herbivorous animal, is a surprising one to find as the head-word in a kenning for “rat,” an omnivore presented here—if the proposed interpretation is accepted— as distinctly carnivorous; and

second, that it is not certain that the verb *gjalla*, meaning “to yell,” “to scream,” etc., could be used of a rodent. With regard to the first of these, I must acknowledge that I have not found elsewhere any instance of a word meaning “ox” used as the base-word in a kenning for a more noxious animal, though it is noteworthy that one of the words listed in the same *pula* as *hríðr* among poetic appellations for “ox” is *öldungr*, m., a word meaning (among other things) “old bull” in prose, which appears in another *pula*, probably also from the thirteenth century, listing poetic appellations for “fox.”³³ It may further be noted that in the skaldic poem *Haustlong* (*Autumn-long*) by Þjóðólfr of Hvinir, dating from the late ninth or early tenth century, the kenning *okbjörn* (yoke-bear) is used for “ox.”³⁴ If a word with an omnivorous animal as its referent could thus function metaphorically as the head-word in a kenning for a herbivorous animal, it must surely be allowed that this metaphorical process could occur in reverse as well. As for the question of whether the verb *gjalla* could be used of a rodent, it must be re-emphasized that, whether or not this was the case, the verb is known to have been used of cattle in the sense “to bellow,” and that its use here of a rodent seems to be justified by the element of metaphor that the word *hríðr* (ox)—if understood as the head-word in a rat-kenning—brings to the half-stanza.

A final possible objection has to do with metrical considerations. It will be noticed that the reading of the stanza proposed here lacks the examples of internal half-rhyme (*skothending*) and rhyme (*aðalhending*) that one might expect to find in the odd-numbered and even-numbered lines, respectively, of a *dróttkvætt* stanza. The present reading shows, it is true, an example of rhyme (*blóði/bróður*) in line 5, an odd-numbered line, but in strict *dróttkvætt* a (full) rhyme of this type (of vowel plus consonant, i.e. *aðalhending*), would be expected to occur in an even-numbered line. This “incorrect” occurrence of full rhyme in an odd-numbered line—the only occurrence of any kind of rhyme in the entire stanza—is typical of the skaldic verses of *Ragnars saga* (i.e. those numbered 1–37 in Olsen’s edition), in which rhyme occurs only sporadically, if at all: although both *skothending* and *aðalhending* do occasionally occur, it is not necessarily in the appropriate lines.³⁵ There can thus be no objection to the reading offered here as far as *hendingar* are concerned, whether involving rhyme or half-rhyme. It might further be objected that the present reading of the stanza leaves line 7 (*hríðr veggja slíta*) with one syllable short of the six that would be expected of a normal *dróttkvætt* line. This is hardly a valid objection, however, since the relative looseness of the *dróttkvætt* form in which the skaldic verses of *Ragnars saga* are composed shows itself not only in their haphazard treatment of *hendingar* but also in the not infrequent occurrence of lines having

fewer than six syllables each.³⁶

More serious is the fact that the reading offered here leaves lines 7 and 8 without the alliteration that ought to link them to one another, that is, with the first stressed syllable of the even-numbered line, the *hofuðstafr* or head-stave, alliterating with two stressed syllables in the immediately preceding odd-numbered line. Not only are the two lines not linked by alliteration in this manner, as strict *dróttkvætt* would require; line 7 also lacks the internal alliteration on two stressed syllables that an odd-numbered line in strict *dróttkvætt* would be expected to have. Alliteration is one respect in which the skaldic verses of *Ragnars saga* as preserved in NKS 1824 b are relatively strict. Leaving aside for the moment the stanza under discussion, we may note that among the thirty-seven skaldic stanzas of *Ragnars saga* preserved in this manuscript only two couplets—i.e. pairs of lines in which the first line is odd- and the second even-numbered—show a lack of linking alliteration.³⁷ Only three odd-numbered lines are defective with regard to internal alliteration, though each of these three contains one stressed syllable which alliterates with the head-stave in the following line.³⁸ In one of these two couplets (stanza 28/5–6) it is obvious that the head-stave, beginning with *s*, has been omitted by accident, and can easily be supplied by emendation;³⁹ the other couplet (stanza 19/7–8) is of some interest in the present context, and deserves to be discussed, as does one of the three instances of defective internal alliteration (stanza 13/7).

To take the latter example first, the lines in which it occurs, constituting the second half of stanza 13, may be quoted from the 1824 b text in normalized spelling, and with translation, as follows:

Þá mun mest af móði,
er mik spyrja dauðan,
mín stjúp móðir sínum
mögum þögl segja.

Then, when they hear that I am dead, my stepmother, in the greatest passion of spirit, will silently tell her sons about it.

Here Eirekr is reciting the third of his four stanzas while awaiting death at King Eysteinn's hands. In the prose intervening between this stanza and stanza 12 he has taken a ring from his arm and sent it to Ragnarr's second wife Áslaug, his stepmother. In the first half of stanza 13 he has said that Áslaug should be told that she may have his rings. It will be noticed that the penultimate line of the stanza, line 7 (*mín stjúp móðir sínum*), is defective with regard to internal alliteration. There is internal alliteration on *s* in the line, it is true, but the first stressed element in the following line begins with *m* (*mögum*) and

requires internal alliteration on *m* in the preceding line. This is inadequately supplied in line 7, since *móðir* is the second element in the compound word *stjúpmóðir* and bears only secondary stress. Consequently, it cannot be regarded as alliterating with *mín*, at least for the purposes of *dróttkvætt*.⁴⁰ (It may also be noticed, incidentally, that *mín* and *sín(um)* constitute an example of full rhyme, here occurring in an odd-numbered line rather than, as might be expected, in an even-numbered one.) Now it so happens that this stanza, unlike stanza 12, is also preserved in AM 544 4to (in *Hauksbók*) where lines 7–8, reproduced here in normalized spelling, appear as follows:

mín stjúpmóðir mildum
mögum sínum til segja.⁴¹

my stepmother [... will] tell her gentle sons about it.

This reading provides the internal alliteration on *m* that is strictly required in line 7 (and also, incidentally, six syllables in line 8 if resolution of the two syllables of *mögum* into one is allowed for; this line as preserved in NKS 1824 b is problematic with regard to syllable-count).⁴² On the other hand, the *Hauksbók* reading is much less satisfactory semantically than what appears in NKS 1824 b. The application by Eirekr of the adjective *mildr* (gentle) to Áslaug's sons—his stepbrothers, whom he presumably expects to avenge him—is strange in the context, to say the least. Furthermore, the *Hauksbók* reading lacks altogether the dramatic effect of the adjective *þögl* (silent) that is found in NKS 1824 b, where it conjures up the picture of Áslaug simply showing the ring—rather than speaking—to her sons, and thereby encouraging them to take revenge.⁴³ The NKS 1824 b text of *Ragnars saga* thus seems to suggest that the Y redactor has allowed for a departure here from the strict rules of *dróttkvætt* for the sake of dramatic effect.⁴⁴

The example from stanza 19, which also occurs in the last two lines of the stanza, may now be discussed. The half-stanza containing it may be quoted from NKS 1824 b in normalized spelling (with emendation indicated by the italic *a* in line 6) and with translation, as follows:

Skal eigi Uppsölum,
þó at ófafé bjóði,
ef svá duga dísir,
Eysteinn konungr ráða.⁴⁵

If the *dísir* give of their best, King Eysteinn will not rule Uppsala, though he may offer excessive payment.

Here Sigurðr ormr-í-auga (Snake-in-eye), Ragnarr's youngest son by his second wife, Áslaug, is advocating a hostile mission to Sweden to avenge the deaths of Eirekr and Agnarr, his stepbrothers, and to bring an end to Eysteinn's rule in Uppsala, however great a sum Eysteinn may offer in appeasement. There is internal alliteration (on *d*) in line 7, the penultimate line of the stanza, but no alliterative link with line 8, where the first syllable of *Eysteinn* occupies the head-stave position. This stanza also occurs in *Hauksbók*, in AM 544 4to, and is preserved fragmentarily in AM 147 4to.⁴⁶ Variant forms in these manuscripts show their reading of the line to be: *ef oss duga eggjar* (if [our sword-] edges serve us well). This reading of the line provides alliteration linking the two lines of the couplet (through vowel alliteration of *oss* and *eigi* with *Eysteinn*),⁴⁷ thus satisfying the rules of *dróttkvætt*, but once again the "corrected" version of the lines is less satisfactory semantically than what is found in NKS 1824 b. In the latter, reference is made to the *dísir*, female supernatural beings who were associated with victory in battle as well as with fertility.⁴⁸ The reference is not only eminently appropriate in the context, but it is also surely charged with an infinitely heavier and more powerful weight of meaning than the relatively flat reference to sword-edges found in the other two manuscripts.⁴⁹ Here the text of NKS 1824 b seems to reflect a greater interest in the semantic effect of the passage than in adherence to the rule of line-linking alliteration.

These two examples seem to suggest that the Y redactor of *Ragnars saga*, or possibly the scribe of NKS 1824 b, was prepared to disregard the strict rules of alliteration in *dróttkvætt* in favor of a powerful effect of meaning. In the case of these two examples it has been possible to compare the lines in question with their realization in two other texts; this has not been possible in the case of stanza 12, since, as indicated above, this stanza is accessible only in NKS 1824 b.⁵⁰ Whatever the precise relationship of the text in that manuscript to those other texts, the two examples just discussed provide evidence of a tendency in NKS 1824 b to disregard the strict rules of alliteration in skaldic poetry in favor of striking semantic effects. If the contrast of rat with raven which the present discussion has found embodied in stanza 12 may be accepted as such an effect, I would submit that this stanza is a further example of that tendency, and that this overrides any objection that might be made on metrical grounds to the reading here proposed for it.

I would emphasize in conclusion that a great advantage of the reading offered here is that it obviates the need for emendation, provided that it can be accepted that meaning in skaldic poetry is sometimes more important than strict adherence to the demands of metrical form. Stanzas 13 and 19 of *Ragnars saga* surely indicate this,

even when it is acknowledged that the skaldic verses in that saga are relatively strict with regard to alliteration, if not with regard to other aspects of meter. The argument of this essay is offered very tentatively, as indicated at the outset. Whether it is accepted or not, it may have some value in drawing attention to the questions of how far and how often the strict demands of metrical form should be taken into account in the emending and editing of problematic passages of skaldic poetry.

WIT AND WISDOM: THE WORLDVIEW OF THE OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC RIDDLES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO EDDIC POETRY

Hannah Burrows

Old Norse-Icelandic riddles, most notably those contained in the *fornaldarsaga* (saga of ancient time) *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, have not often been considered as part of the medieval Scandinavian poetic canon. Both individually and as a collection, however, the riddles offer exciting new perspectives on more traditional subjects of study, and on literary genres, entertainment, and learning in medieval Scandinavia. They appear in unusual poetic forms such as *greppaminni* (poets' reminder) (Riddle 7)¹ and *ofljóst* (lit. "too obvious") (Riddle 35). They are woven from tantalizing mythological references (to wave-maidens in Riddles 21–24, and to Ítrekr and Andaðr in Riddle 32) and echoes of eddic texts (of *Fjölsvinnsmál* in Riddle 3, of *Hávamál* in Riddles 8–16, and of *Vafþrúðnismál* in Riddle 37). They offer creative depictions of objects from Scandinavian life. They raise intriguing questions as to their purpose and function: why, apart from a scant few other traces, are these our only record of medieval Scandinavian riddles? And what is their relationship to other Old Norse poetry? Are they literary entertainment, as their *fornaldarsaga* context indicates? Or—as would be analogous with other early European cultures—did they originate in a more learned environment, as Riddle 25's citation in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* and their parallel with the (separate, and differently-styled) riddles found in the so-called *Laufás Edda* redaction of Snorri's *Edda* might suggest? The riddles, moreover, have an intriguing reception history, with a complex set of manuscript relations and a little-known seventeenth-century commentary by the Icelandic scholar Björn á Skarðsá, an expert on native poetry. Although the present essay cannot address all of these avenues of investigation, it begins to rehabilitate the riddles into medieval Scandinavian literary and cultural studies, and in doing so, to demonstrate the new dimensions they can bring to our understanding of poetry, mythology, and society.

The essay examines certain aspects of the riddles' relationship to eddic wisdom poetry, a relationship which has been observed before,² but which merits more extensive investigation. Elsewhere I have explored some of the ways in which the language, imagery, and traditions certain riddles draw upon (with a focus on supernatural

women) are closely linked to that used by eddic poetry.³ In the present paper I wish to take a different approach, and focus in particular on the riddles' world view, and whether or not it can be compared to that expounded in certain of the eddic wisdom poems. I will argue that while much of the riddles' style, diction, and matter draw on traditional poetic conceits, their form and status as riddles is crucial to interpreting where, how, and why their perspectives and aims differ from those of eddic poetry.

WHAT DO RIDDLES DO?

Riddles are, to all intents and purposes, universal: societies in virtually every time and every place have felt a need or a desire to compose or relate them.⁴ Eleanor Cook has recently richly explored the literary riddle and the use of enigma as trope,⁵ and I will restrict my observations here to some brief and very general remarks concerning social contexts and functions rather than theological or rhetorical usages.

In modern times, particularly in Western cultures, riddles have been collected largely as entertainment, perhaps as a form of mental stimulation or "innocent amusement" suitable for children—or people of "high taste."⁶ In other societies, they are entertainment serving the further purpose of reinforcing social conventions.⁷ In the folk traditions of some cultures, riddles or riddling descriptions are used to conceal taboo names, such as those of wild animals, reflecting a fear that to name the animal after dark will incite it to do harm.⁸ The converse belief, that naming a thing gives power over it,⁹ is exhibited in yet other traditional cultures, and is a custom John McKinnell refers to but ultimately rejects in relation to Vafþrúðnir's questions to Óðinn in the eddic wisdom poem *Vafþrúðnismál*.¹⁰ Vafþrúðnir asks almost exclusively about names for things rather than seeking more detailed information as Óðinn does.¹¹ Naming is, however, an important facet of what the riddles do, and I shall return to this topic later.

Whether or not riddles are formally classified as part of a culture's "wisdom literature," it is a common observation that they may share with it certain aims.¹² A fuller understanding of a thing provides a measure of control over it, reassurance in encountering it, or, at least, acceptance of what about it cannot be controlled.¹³ Morton Bloomfield writes: "the purpose of wisdom and its literature is to suggest a scheme of life in the broadest sense of the word, to ensure its continuance, to predict its variations and to associate humanity with the fundamental rhythms of nature. It is an attempt to control life by some kind of order, to reduce the area of the unexpected and the sudden."¹⁴ Such concerns can be observed in the Old Norse-Icelandic

riddle corpus, though it should also be noted that “the unexpected and the sudden” is precisely an effect riddles often aim to achieve, and this is in large part what differentiates them from eddic wisdom verse.

The folklorist Elli Köngäs Maranda notes a similar distinction between “myths” and riddles:

Functionally myths seem to reinforce the established order, whereas the primary function of riddles is to question at least certain kinds of established order.... Riddles make a point of playing with conceptual boundaries and crossing them for the intellectual pleasure of showing that things are not quite as stable as they appear.¹⁵

Although, as will be seen, I disagree with some of Maranda’s assumptions, at least in the context of the *Hervarar saga* riddles, the connection she makes between riddles and boundaries is important, and her choice of the word “playing” apposite. Highlighting “intellectual pleasure” is also key: riddles are of course attractive as cerebral challenges, a feature that might be assumed to have had particular appeal to the society which produced the enormously technically difficult skaldic poetry. The riddle is not, moreover, merely a puzzle to be solved: once its solution is known, the riddling description has ongoing value in the fresh perspective it provides on its subject,¹⁶ and in the pleasure of recognizing the aptness of the description and assessing the world anew.

THE *HERVARAR SAGA* RIDDLES AND EDDIC MYTHOLOGICAL POETRY: STRUCTURAL SIMILARITIES

The *Hervarar saga* riddles use eddic metres (mainly *ljóðaháttir* interspersed with *fornyrðislag*), most consisting of six or seven lines plus a two-line refrain forming an injunction to the solver (King Heiðrekr) to guess the riddle. Their age is difficult to ascertain: the oldest manuscript of the saga, Hauksbók (Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling AM 544 4to) dates from the first decade of the fourteenth century, though beyond Riddle 2 we rely on late paper copies for an account of the riddle-match, so we cannot make any certain claims about which riddles appeared in the original. Other approaches are available: the beginning of one of the riddles (Riddle 25) appears in Óláfr Þórðarson’s *Third Grammatical Treatise*, from the mid-thirteenth century. Some have parallels with riddles, both traditional and learned, known from other and older cultures.¹⁷ It has been argued that the riddles were written especially for the saga,¹⁸ though I am inclined to think that many were already extant and collected by the compiler(s), and are thus of differing ages.¹⁹

In the saga, the riddles are presented in the context of a wisdom contest between the king and a man whom he believes to be his enemy Gestumblindi, but who is actually the god Óðinn in disguise. If Gestumblindi can pose a riddle Heiðrekr is unable to solve, he will be pardoned, saving his life. The episode has little connection with the plot of the saga either up to that point or after it, and seems largely to be an excuse to get the riddles into the saga (as is arguably also the case for most of its other poetry). The head-ransom situation has particularly close affinities with the eddic dialogue poem *Vafþrúðnismál*, in which Óðinn (again in disguise) pits his wisdom against the giant Vafþrúðnir, and which ends with the same “unanswerable” question used to defeat Heiðrekr, namely what Óðinn himself said into the ear of his dead son Baldr. It also means, crucially, that solutions to all of the riddles (except the last) are provided alongside each, in the form of Heiðrekr’s prose responses.

A disguised Óðinn propounds poetic wisdom on a third occasion in another eddic poem, *Grímnismál*. Although this poem is presented as a monologue rather than a contest, the revelation of Óðinn’s identity at the end and the high stakes involved are situationally similar to *Vafþrúðnismál* and the *Hervarar saga* riddle match. All three episodes are concerned with privileged knowledge: “segðu ... allz þic svinnan / fróðan qveða” (tell ... since you are said to be wise), Óðinn demands of Vafþrúðnir (stanzas 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36),²⁰ and points out that “þat fáir vito” (few know it) in *Grímnismál* 18 and 22.²¹ The esoteric knowledge of which Óðinn speaks could, further, be said to be enigmatic in nature: “við hvat einheriar alaz” (with what the Einherjar [Óðinn’s army of slain warriors] are nourished; stanza 18/6),²² and “hvé hon er í lás lokin” (how it [i.e. Valgrind, apparently the gate or fence around Valhalla, though only found here] is locked with a latch; stanza 22/6).²³ If rearranged to be phrased as questions rather than statements, these mysteries could easily be the subject of challenges put to Vafþrúðnir or Heiðrekr.

The comparability of these two eddic poems—and the nature of the worldview they present—has been usefully explored by Carolyne Larrington: “*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* ... address ... questions of Time and Space, history and geography,” she asserts.²⁴ Elsewhere, she defines a wisdom poem as “a poem which exists primarily to impart a body of information about the condition of the world,” using *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* as examples.²⁵ Larrington also notes the received scholarly interpretation of *Vafþrúðnismál* as “intended to present useful mythological facts to an audience, framed by a contest here made more interesting by a wager of heads,”²⁶ and a similar claim has been made for *Grímnismál*.²⁷ This essay investigates whether or not the *Hervarar saga* riddles can be considered to do the same,

using Larrington's criterion that the poetry is concerned with "information about the condition of the world" rather than the narrower purpose of conveying mythological information. Dependence or borrowing in either direction between the riddles and the poems can be effectively ruled out;²⁸ I am not seeking to identify sources or influences, but to explore whether or not their agendas are comparable.

THE HERVARAR SAGA RIDDLE-CORPUS

There are 37 of the so-called *Heiðreks gátur* (riddles of Heiðrekr) in the edition forthcoming in volume 8 of the Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages series,²⁹ but their presentation is quite different in each of the three extant redactions of the saga.³⁰ The first, sometimes called the H redaction after its main manuscript witness (Hauksbók) contains the most riddles: 36 of the 37. It also orders them most logically, grouping together riddles with the same or similar beginnings. However, owing to a lacuna in the manuscript, only the first two riddles appear in Hauksbók itself; the extant witnesses to its version of the riddle-match are two seventeenth-century paper copies of an intermediary made prior to the damage to Hauksbók: Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling AM 281 4to and Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling AM 597b 4to. The so-called R redaction, witnessed by Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar GKS 2845 4to, from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, contains 30 riddles, including one not found in the H redaction. The youngest version, U (Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek R715; seventeenth century), contains 28 of the riddles.

The order of the riddles is also quite different in each redaction, with only H having any apparent ordering principle. [Table 1](#) lists each riddle according to its number in the Skaldic Project edition together with its solution (or an indication of its subject matter where its solution is not able to be neatly encapsulated). The letter "X" indicates that the riddle does not appear in a particular redaction.

TABLE 1. DISPOSITION OF RIDDLES ACROSS THE H, R, AND U REDACTIONS OF HERVARAR SAGA

<i>H</i> (281 and 597b)	<i>R</i> (2845)	<i>U</i> (R715)
1 Ale	1 Ale	1 Ale
2 Paths	2 Paths	2 Paths
3 Dew	3 Dew	3 Dew
4 Hammer	4 Hammer	4 Hammer
5 Fog	9 Bellows	22 Waves
6 Anchor	14 Spider	23 Waves
7 Raven, dew, fish, waterfall	X	X
8 Leek	8 Leek	21 Waves
9 Bellows	16 Obsidian	20 Ptarmigans
10 Hail	X	X
11 Dung beetle	X	X
12 Pregnant sow	17 Swan	14 Spider
13 Arrow	X	X
14 Spider	18 Angelica	8 Leek
15 Sun	X	X
16 Obsidian	25 Dead snake on an ice-floe	18 Angelica
17 Swan	32 Ítrekr & Andaðr	32 Ítrekr & Andaðr
18 Angelica	19 <i>Hnefatafl</i> pieces	19 <i>Hnefatafl</i> pieces
19 <i>Hnefatafl</i> pieces	30 Fire	26 <i>Húnn</i> in <i>hnefatafl</i>
20 Ptarmigans	5 Fog	16 Obsidian
21 Waves	26 <i>Húnn</i> in <i>hnefatafl</i>	30 Fire
22 Waves	27 Shield	5 Fog
X	20 Ptarmigans	24 Waves
24 Waves	22 Waves	6 Anchor
25 Dead snake on an ice-floe	21 Waves	9 Bellows
26 <i>Húnn</i> in <i>hnefatafl</i>	23 Waves	17 Swan
27 Shield	28 Duck nesting in a skull	25 Dead snake on an ice-floe
28 Duck nesting in a skull	6 Anchor	28 Duck nesting in a skull
29 Cow	24 Waves	X
30 Fire	33 Piglets	27 Shield
31 Rod & loom	X	X
32 Ítrekr & Andaðr	12 Pregnant sow	33 Piglets
33 Piglets	29 Cow	12 Pregnant sow
34 Embers	X	X
35 <i>ofljóst</i> riddle (natural phenomena)	35 <i>ofljóst</i> riddle (natural phenomena)	X
36 Óðinn & Sleipnir	36 Óðinn & Sleipnir	36 Óðinn & Sleipnir
37? (Baldr riddle)	37? (Baldr riddle)	37? (Baldr riddle)

The arrangement of the material and its preservation highlight a

contextual distinction between the riddles individually and as a collection. Do individual riddles impart information about the world? In what respects does this correspond to the cosmic lore expounded in the eddic poems? How do they work together, and does analyzing them as a collection add anything to their interpretation? Although questions have been raised as to whether certain stanzas are “original” or interpolated,³¹ the poems of the Poetic Edda are, after all, poems: designed as composite works, with integrity and structure which can be analyzed as significant. Larrington writes of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*: “although at one level both poems appear to consist of a multitude of randomly assembled mythological facts, at another level the facts work together to produce further, often subtextual meanings which could be described as ‘ideological.’”³² The riddles, on the other hand, have no such unity; indeed, the collection is described as “rambling” by Alaric Hall.³³ To what extent, however, can a particular motivation, cosmological or otherwise, be traced in their selection and presentation? In other words, did the saga compiler and/or redactors bring them together in such a way as to give them a force or direction as a collection that they do not or may not have as individual stanzas? Or did they simply include all the riddles they knew?

The place of the riddles within *Hervarar saga*—and particularly the head-ransom contest frame-situation and accompanying prose—is also important to the interpretation of the riddles and their function, and will be referred to where relevant in the following analysis. A further contextual consideration, that of the nature and status of the manuscripts containing the riddles, is largely beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth foregrounding the significance of the fact that one of the major manuscript witnesses of the saga is Hauksbók, owned, compiled and to a large extent written by the lawman Haukr Erlendsson in the first decade of the fourteenth century. Sverrir Jakobsson argues: “Hauksbók can be read as a collective product of Icelandic culture dispersed in space and time. It makes feasible a close analysis of the dominant world view in Iceland from 1100 to 1400 and the belief systems which shaped this world view.”³⁴ The riddles’ inclusion in this compilation—indeed, more extensive inclusion than in other witnesses—thus confirms their part in the medieval Icelandic worldview.

WHAT DO THE *HERVARAR SAGA* RIDDLES DO?

That the riddles, both individually and as a collection, are concerned with the condition of the world is immediately apparent from their solutions. Overall, twenty-six of the riddles relate to the natural world,

eight to man-made objects, and three to mythological referents (including the “unanswerable” question relating to Baldr). The following analysis centers around three main areas of comparison with and contrast to eddic wisdom poetry: cosmological concerns, social norms, and techniques of listing and naming.

Cosmological Concerns

To begin with, then, can any of the riddles be said to provide “useful mythological facts”?³⁵ Only a few have mythological phenomena as solutions (Riddles 32, 36, and 37; see below), but mythological information is alluded to in several more. Riddles 19–20, for instance, draw on the imagery of the shield maiden or valkyrie, selector of warriors fated to die in battle, referring to “drósir” (girls, 19/1) who “vega” (fight, 19/3) and “skjöld ... bera” (bear shields, 20/4–5).³⁶ Meanwhile, one of the clues in Riddle 15 relies on mythological knowledge to be solved (lines 1, 4–6):

Hvat er þat undra ...
lýðum lýsir, en loga gleypir
ok keppast um þat vargar ávalt?

What wonder is that ... it gives light to men, but swallows flame,
and wolves strive after it always?

The solution is the sun, with reference to the mythical wolves Skallí and Hatti (so named in *Hervarar saga*; they are Sköll and Hati in *Grímnismál* 39/1, 39/4, and *Gylfaginning*). *Gylfaginning* explains that the wolves will swallow the sun and moon at the time of Ragnarök, the eschatological destruction of the world in Norse mythology:

Hann hræðisk hon ok hann mun taka hana, en sá heitir Hati
Hróðvitnisson er fyrir henni hleypr, ok vill hann taka tunglit, ok svá
mun verða.

She [i.e. the sun] is afraid of him [Sköll] and he will catch her, and that one is called Hati Hróðvitnisson who runs before her, and he wishes to catch the moon, and so it will happen.³⁷

The mythological detail is only one of three descriptive statements in the riddle about the sun, however: the riddle is not about the wolves or Ragnarök, and does not provide information about these phenomena but rather requires the solver to know about them already. *Grímnismál* 39 on the same myth is more informative, presenting details as factual, if circumlocutory, statements:

Scöll heitir úlfr, er fylgir ino scírleita goði
til varna viðar;
enn annarr Hati, hann er Hróðvitnis sonr,
sá scal fyr heiða brúði himins.³⁸

The wolf is called Sköll, who pursues the bright faced god [i.e. the moon] to the protection of the trees; the second is Hati, he is Hróðvitnir's son; that one shall [pursue] the bright bride of heaven [i.e. the sun].

Unsurprisingly, given the importance of the event, *Vafþrúðnismál* 47 also refers to the destruction of the sun at Ragnarøk, but prefers the alternative account, that it is the mythical wolf Fenrir (who has a more prominent role in Norse mythology and at Ragnarøk than do Skalli and Hatti) who will swallow it.³⁹

Riddle 36 also requires some knowledge of mythology to be solved (lines 1–4):

Hverjar eru þeir tveir, er tíu hafa fætr,
augu þrjú, ok einn hala?

Who are those two, who have ten feet, three eyes, and one tail?

The solution reveals that this strange creature is actually Óðinn himself, riding his horse Sleipnir. To be successful the solver must be aware of Sleipnir’s eight legs (having been supernaturally conceived of the god Loki in the form of a mare and a stallion owned by a giant, as recounted in *Gylfaginning*), and Óðinn’s single eye (having exchanged the other for a drink from Mímir’s well, “er spekð ok mannvit er í fólgt” [in which wisdom and reason are kept]).⁴⁰ “Trick” riddles such as this are a recognized type,⁴¹ and it is more likely that the riddle is intended to be humorous than to convey any serious facts, though it could certainly act as a mnemonic for the various stories involved.

Riddle 32—for which the prose solution reads: “þat er Ítrekr ok Andaðr, er þeir sitja at taflí sínu” (that is Ítrekr and Andaðr, when they sit at their *tafl*-board)—is also noteworthy in the present context. There are a considerable number of references in Old Norse-Icelandic literatures to the board-game *tafl* or *hnefatafl*, including in two other riddles (19 and 26).⁴² As Christopher Tolkien notes,⁴³ Ítrekr may have been an Óðinn name: *Ítreksjóð* (Ítrekr’s offspring) is listed among the *Ása heiti* (*Names of the Æsir*) in the *þulur*, or versified lists of synonyms found toward the end of *Skáldskaparmál*. Meanwhile, an Anduðr or Qnduðr is found among the *Jotna heiti* (*Names of giants*).⁴⁴ Both Tolkien and Ursula Dronke suggest a representative connection between *hnefatafl* and the well-documented conflict between gods and

giants,⁴⁵ a battle of wits in another form than those waged in the poetic contexts under discussion here. The three riddles on *hnefatafl* all appear in each redaction, though it would indubitably be overstating the case to claim that this emphasis was based on a possible allusion to the Æsir-giant clash as a way of conveying information about it. Rather, *hnefatafl* was probably considered to be interesting as another form of specialized knowledge,⁴⁶ in the same way that were skill in riddling or knowledge of mythology. The game is significant in eddic poetry too: in *Völuspá* 8/1 we are told that the Æsir *teflðo* (played *hnefatafl*) in the Golden Age early in the world's chronology,⁴⁷ while *Völuspá* 61 predicts that the gods' playing-pieces will be once again discovered in the new world after Ragnarök.⁴⁸ It is also worthy of note that most of the other riddles relating to human activities are also from skilled or elite spheres: smithing (Riddles 4 and 9), seafaring (Riddle 6), and warfare (Riddles 13 and 27).

The H-redaction hints at a possible explanation for the relative scarcity of mythological material in the collection, having Heiðrekr retort after the Óðinn/Sleipnir riddle, “margs freistar þú nú, er þú finnr þau rök til framburðar við mik, er forðum váru” (you are really making a game of it now, when you find in your deliveries to me those wonders which happened in ancient times).⁴⁹ It could be that, as Hilda Ellis Davidson suggests, mythological riddles had become outmoded;⁵⁰ perhaps the compilers did not know many, or deliberately omitted them from the collection in favor of other types of riddle. The sun-riddle (Riddle 15) is only found in the H redaction, but other riddles with mythological allusions are included in R and U, making it difficult to say whether the reference to the mythological wolves was a deliberate omission on grounds of obscurity by the other redactors, or an addition by the redactor of H. The mythological references in the collection are far from insignificant, and—given that Heiðrekr is conversing (albeit unknowingly) with Óðinn himself in a time setting somewhere in the *fornöld* (ancient time)—his accusations of outdatedness are rather anachronistic, and perhaps a source of knowing amusement for the saga's audience. Nevertheless, with the possible exception of one or two riddles, it cannot be said that their purpose is to directly impart mythological information, either individually or as a collection. The aspects of mythology they do address, however—the chief of the gods, Ragnarök, and the afterlife—are not only fundamental to eddic poetry but represent key aspects of the pagan religion that likely remained in general understanding long after the conversion to Christianity.

Their limited focus on the mythological does not preclude the riddles from having a stake in cosmological matters. The collection is very interested in the natural environment, a concern also present in

eddic poetry. In *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*, this concern is on a cosmic or macro level: in the former, Óðinn asks about the origins of earth and sky, sun and moon, while the latter is interested in the properties of the different mythological homes of the gods. The riddles, on the other hand, are more concerned with the minutiae of the natural world, covering subjects as lowly as the dung beetle (Riddle 11) and the leek (Riddle 8). The descriptions of these subjects, however, in the riddling questions and clues, are often in grander terms. The leek is a case in point (Riddle 8/4–6):

Höfði sínu vísa á helvega,
en fótum til sólar snýr.

With its head it points the roads to Hel, but with its feet turns toward the sun.

In the riddle the vegetable—a popular one in Norse poetry, including in kennings, where it is common as a determinant—seems almost to become a bridge between the underworld and the sun, rather like an inverted Yggdrasill, the “world tree” of Norse mythology. Yggdrasill’s roots reach down to various mythological worlds, and its branches, as *Gylfaginning* tells us, “standa yfir himni” (stretch across the sky).⁵¹ Similarly, the ptarmigan, a seasonally-camouflaged bird found in arctic and subarctic regions of the northern hemisphere, becomes a valkyrie or shield maiden (Riddle 20/4–6):

Hvítan skjöld þær um vetr bera,
en svartan um sumar.

They bear a white shield during winter, but a black one during summer;

angelica plants become “rýgjar / á reginfjalli” (giantesses on the mighty mountain, Riddle 18/1–2).

These riddles can be interpreted as performing a variety of functions, many of them intertwining with the purposes of riddles in general that were highlighted earlier. They may serve to bring out the mythological in the mundane, making the mythological or supernatural part of the fabric of everyday life. The ideology behind them is conversant with the description of the formation of the world and its component parts from the body of the primeval giant Ymir, found in similarly worded stanzas in both *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál*⁵² and explained in detail in Snorri’s *Edda*. They can also be argued to subscribe to the understanding of the universe found, as Peter Hallberg has demonstrated, in mythological poetry: of “a

thoroughly *animated* world ... a creation expressed as a totality.”⁵³ This is also a concept expounded by Snorri, in the Prologue to his *Edda*:

Þat hugsuðu þeir ok undruðusk hverju þat mundi gegna at jorðin ok dýrin ok fuglarnir höfðu saman eðli í sumum hlutum ok var þó ólíkt at hætti. Þat var eitt eðli at jorðin var grafin í hám fjalltindum ok spratt þar vatn upp ok þurfti þar eigi lengra at grafa til vaz en í djúpum dolum. Svá eru ok dýr ok fuglar, at jafnlangt er til blóðs í höfði ok fótum.... Björg ok steina þýddu þeir á móti tønnum ok beinum kvikvenda. Af þessu skilðu þeir svá at jorðin væri kyk ok hefði líf með nokkurum hætti.⁵⁴

They thought about that and wondered what it must mean that the earth and animals and birds had the same nature in some things and yet were unlike in kind. It was one characteristic that the earth was dug into on high mountain-peaks and water sprang up there and there was no need to dig further to the water than in deep dales. So it is also with animals and birds, that it is equally far to blood in the head and the feet.... Rocks and stones they interpreted as corresponding to the teeth and bones of creatures. From this they discerned that the earth was alive and had life of some sort.

On the one hand, this animistic or organic view of the world fits very well with Bloomfield’s description of wisdom literature cited above: that its purpose is “to associate humanity with the fundamental rhythms of nature.” In this vein, it is surely significant that there are four riddles about waves, while no other subject matter is duplicated: medieval Scandinavians needed myriad ways of talking about the sea, a vital—and dangerous—part of their lives, and wished to negotiate their complicated relationship with it.⁵⁵ In fact, several of the riddles are concerned with the relationship between the objects they describe and man: an anchor “öldum bergr” (protects men, Riddle 6/4), but fog “glygg ... óast, / en gumna eigi” (fears the wind, but not men; Riddle 5/4–5). Seen as wisdom literature, this could be an attempt to delineate man’s place and his limits: he cannot control the fog, and in this respect is subordinate to the wind. Similarly, objects which are personified or given animal-like qualities are arguably brought closer to the realms of human experience, making them less foreign and easier to relate to, identify, and, perhaps, deal with. Fire “sefr í ösgrúa” (sleeps in the ash-grate) and is “fagrgjarn” (eager for brightness, Riddle 30/2, 5). A shield is a “dyrr” (creature) that “liggr við löfa / lík sitt guma” (lies his body against the palm of a man, Riddle 27/1, 7–8). Even a goldsmith’s hammer has “munna tvá” (two mouths) and “kyssir mjök fast” (kisses very firmly, Riddle 4/5, 4).

On the other hand, to “compare an object to another entirely different object” is a fundamental riddling device,⁵⁶ and describing one thing in terms of another is also very familiar to Norse poetics: this is after all what kennings do, in a more compressed form.⁵⁷ In the riddles discussed above, such as those for the leek and the ptarmigan, the gap between the description and the thing described creates bathos and humor, another commonplace in riddles. It must be remembered, too, that alongside bringing the familiar into the uncontrollable, the riddles at the same time defamiliarize the everyday. It could equally be pointed out that angelica was just angelica until Gestumblindi made it into giantesses. None of the riddles are particularly ominous, but they are all by their nature disconcerting, some more so than others. For every shield made into a domestic pet, there is a common pregnant sow made into a monstrous creature with “tíu ... tungur, / tuttugu augu, / fjóra tígu fóta” (ten tongues, twenty eyes, forty feet; Riddle 12/4–6). Suddenly we fail to recognize a cow or a chess-piece, and the world, like the leek discussed above, is topsy-turvy. The riddles draw on established poetic conventions and traditional ways of looking at the world, in part in order to play with them: to establish a familiar frame of reference which they can then overturn for intellectual pleasure, humorous effect, and the satisfaction of seeing the world anew.

Riddles 8–16 have a formulaic opening explicitly describing their subject as wondrous: “hvát er þat undra?” (what wonder is that? [lit. “what of wonders is that?”]). Seven of these “wonder”-riddles refer to natural phenomena, and two, the bellows and the arrow, to man-made objects. The rest of the opening formula (cited in full below) is somewhat obscure in meaning and may have signified little other than that what followed was to be a riddle,⁵⁸ but it is a typical riddling strategy (and one of which the *Hervarar saga* riddles are fond) to highlight apparent paradoxes in the description,⁵⁹ masking the subject and confusing the solver. The formula aids in this effort, making the subject out to be strange or unusual. At the same time, the descriptions must be recognizably “true” or apt for the riddle to be successful, and so the solver comes to recognize the wondrous in what is described. Even the seemingly simple riddle about the seemingly simple spider invites the solver to see what is unusual—even unique—in a creature ordinarily going largely unnoticed, and to delight in it (Riddle 14/1–6):

Hvat er þat undra,	er ek úti sá
	fyrir Dellings durum?
Fætr hefir átta	en fjögur augu,
ok berr ofar kné en kvið.	

What wonder is that, which I saw outside before Dellinger's doors? It has eight feet and four eyes, and bears its knees higher than its belly.

These intriguing characteristics become obvious when the solution is known, but seem improbable, even paradoxical (particularly the last line), until then. Several of the riddles share an interest in such qualities, which make the question trickier, cleverer, and harder to solve, and which have the effect of producing a new appreciation of their subjects. “Mær við meyjju / mög um getr” (a girl begets a son with a girl), Riddle 18/4–5 perplexingly claims of the propagative techniques of the angelica plant; Riddle 26 conjures monstrous images difficult to reconcile: “horn hefir átta, / en höfuð ekki” (it has eight horns, but no head; lines 4–5). It refers to the *húnn*, apparently a piece in the board game *hnefatafl*, although exactly what the eight horns represent has not been satisfactorily resolved.⁶⁰ “Hverr andalauss lifir?” (Who lives without breath?) demands Riddle 7/3: the fish, of course. The theme of breathlessness is particularly popular in the riddle collection: Riddle 9 describes “ókyrrir tveir / andalausir” (two unquiet things without breath, lines 4–5), referring to a smith's bellows; Riddle 25/6 rather eerily states: “jór var andar vanr” (that steed was lacking in breath). This part of the riddle refers to an ice-floe which is conveying (somewhat improbably, but that being part of the attraction of the riddle), a dead snake. The trope of describing any inanimate object as “without breath” is used particularly compellingly by the riddles, which make something that may have become conventional mysterious and provocative.⁶¹

Grímnismál 25/4–6 hints at a similar kind of paradoxical, enigmatic phenomenon. Speaking of Óðinn's hall, it relates of the mythical goat Heiðrún:

scapker fylla hon scal ins scíra miaðar,
knáat sú veig vanaz.⁶²

she fills a vessel of the shining mead; that draught does not know
how to diminish.

Heiðrún can be understood as the counterpart to the self-replenishing boar Sæhrímnir in stanza 18/6. With both creatures together, the Einherjar will not want for food and drink. The exotic, magical and nourishing liquid produced by Heiðrún in turn bears comparison with Riddle 3's description of dew (lines 1–6):

Hvat er þat drykkja er ek drakk í gær?
Var þat ei vín né vatn,

Mjöðr né mungat, né matar ekki,
þó gekk ek þorstalauss þaðan.

What drink is that which I drank yesterday? It was not wine nor water, mead nor ale, nor anything of food, yet I went thirstless from there.

The solution, dew, is actually quite straightforwardly reached from the clue, being something not conventionally drunk but a liquid nonetheless. However, the description wrong-foots the solver with its pretense of comprehensiveness, simply suggesting it has covered, and excluded, all kinds of drink and food, therefore leaving an unknown quantity to be the substance in question, when in fact it does not rule out all liquids. It also promises that this unknown substance will satiate its consumer, which is reminiscent of the satisfaction of the *Einherjar*, and is particularly evocative of *Vafþrúðnismál* 45, promising new beings in the world after Ragnarök:

Líf oc Lífðrasir, enn þau leynaz muno
í holti Hoddmimis;
morgindöggar þau sér at mat hafa,
þaðan af aldir alaz.⁶³

Líf and Lífþrasir, still they will be concealed in Hóðmimir's wood; they will have morning dew for their food; from them the generations will be raised.

This type of riddle thus shares an interest in mysterious, paradoxical phenomena with eddic poetry, but they have different significances in each. The wisdom poems present facts and answers, while the riddles pose questions. Yet perhaps surprisingly, given the riddles' apparent desire to challenge and disorientate, it is they that ultimately provoke further reflection, leading to deeper understanding. The mythological aspects of the wisdom poems' subject matter is beyond human experience, and their explanations of the world require, as with any religious belief system, a degree of faith: an acceptance that such phenomena exist and can be understood only up to a certain point. A sense of mystery, enigma, yet remains. The riddles, on the other hand, mostly describe everyday objects within the realm of experience of their audience. Their structure thus at first confuses, but knowing the solution—and it is significant that the *Hervarar saga* riddles are, by virtue of their wisdom-contest frame-situation, accompanied by their solutions—means knowing how an object can possess seemingly impossible characteristics; understanding how the riddle works means understanding that the objects are not as

alien as the description makes them out to be. These riddles thus offer a sense of the wonder of the world, but are also a step closer to appreciating and understanding it differently.

Social Norms

Like the eddic wisdom poems, some of the riddles are concerned with human activities and social behavior. The very first of the *Hervarar saga* riddles, for example, describes ale (lines 1–6):

Hafa vildak þat er ek hafða í gær,
lyða lemill, vittu hvat þat var:
 orða tefill,
 ok orða upphesfill.

I wish to have that which I had yesterday, find out what that was: crippler of people, hinderer of words, and instigator of words.

Its description of the effects of alcohol is particularly close to warnings on excessive drinking in *Sigrdrífumál* (stanzas 29–30) and *Hávamál* (stanzas 11–14, 17, 19), which caution against the loss of control over reason and speech (*Hávamál* 12):

Era svá gott, sem gott qveða,
 þvíat færa veit, er fleira dreccr,
 síns til geðs gumi.⁶⁴

It is not as good as it is said to be good, ale of the sons of men; because the man knows less, who drinks more, of his own mind.

Grímnismál, too, blames excessive drinking for Geirrøðr's failure to recognize Óðinn and act properly as a host (stanza 51). The wisdom poems draw on negative experiences and their consequences as cautionary examples, but although the riddle points to the detrimental effects of alcohol, it lacks the overtly moralistic, prescriptive tone of the poems—particularly as the riddler expresses the desire to have again the instrument of the supposedly negative effects. The result is more wryly humorous than discouraging—compounded by the aural impact of the end-rhymed lines 3–6—as the audience solves the riddle through empathetic recognition of its own experiences. In *Hervarar saga*, King Heiðrekr responds, “Fœri honum mungát!” (Bring him ale!). The riddle thus acts in context as a social prompt and an appropriate beginning to the contest that follows: the guest in the hall is offered hospitality, as is codified in *Hávamál* 2–4 and implied in *Vafþrúðnismál* 8–9. Geirrøðr disastrously fails to observe this social obligation in

The social norms of hospitality and feasting are subverted in Riddle 33/5–8:

The jarls drank ale in silence, but the ale-keg stood squealing.

The second riddle is also about the proper place of things (lines 1–6):

I went from home, I made a journey from home, I looked on a way of ways; a way was under and a way over, and a way on all ways.

The solution explains: “þar fórtu yfir árbrú, ok var árvegr undir þér, en fuglar flugu yfir höfði þér ok hjá þér tveim megin, ok var þat þeira vegr” (there you went over a river-bridge, and the river-way was under you, and birds flew over your head and next to you on both sides, and that was their way),⁶⁸ with the H-redaction adding “þú sátt

lax í ánni, ok var þat hans vegr” (you saw a salmon in the river, and that was his way).⁶⁹ This is reminiscent of *Grímnismál*’s enumeration of the mythological realms (stanzas 4–16), each with their rightful inhabitants, except on a human-world scale, with humans, birds, and fish instead of Óðinn, Þjazi, or Baldr. In context, the riddle might be another Odinic wink to the audience, reminding us of his wandering persona, evidenced, for example, in *Hávamál* (e.g. stanza 18/1–3), *Vafþrúðnismál* (e.g. stanza 3/1) and *Grímnismál* (e.g. stanza 46/2).

There is no evidence for how, or even whether, these or any other riddles were performed in medieval Scandinavia outside the context of the saga, but cross-culturally riddles are often coded to teach, reinforce, or participate in social norms.⁷⁰ On a structural level, the contest which frames the riddles in the saga is, implicitly, one of status and power as well as of knowledge and wit, just as that between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir is in *Vafþrúðnismál*. Although *Grímnismál* is a monologue, it too is about social standing on several levels: the battle between Óðinn and Frigg for the supremacy of their respective foster-children against each other; the status of Óðinn, in disguise as Grímnir, as a guest; the test to see whether Geirrðr or his son Agnarr will prove a better host and more deserving king. In *Vafþrúðnismál*, proper order is asserted by the end of the poem: the god triumphs over the giant, and the account of Ragnarøk is countered by its resolution in the new world. In *Grímnismál*, proper order is restored: the guest is treated well, and the worthiest king is crowned. In *Hervarar saga*, the fact that the god of poetry wins the riddle-contest is a revelation of proper order, to be sure, though neither Heiðrekr nor Gestumblindi/Óðinn seems to have much of a moral case for triumph. Yet, though by their very nature the riddles *disrupt* order, in their saga context all but the last (a trick question of no human relevance) are resolved. The audience is not left hanging with a disrupted view of the world; instead, it is granted a new perspective and new material to reflect on in aiming to understand it.⁷¹

Listing and Naming

Each of the *Hervarar saga* riddles demands the name of an object or phenomenon; each riddle lists certain of its subject’s characteristics. The technique of listing, particularly listing of names, is widespread in Old Norse literature in both oral and literate contexts,⁷² including in eddic poetry. Elizabeth Jackson’s description of the purposes of lists corresponds closely with the purposes of wisdom poetry, and some of those of riddling, which have been outlined above:

One of man’s earliest intellectual activities was to make lists of natural and social phenomena, lists which often reflected observed

Skáldskaparmál), and if we take into account the meaning of Svalinn's name—"Cooling One"—both may be considered as accounts of natural phenomena (Riddle 5/1–6):

Hverr er sá inn mikli, er líðr mold yfir?
Svelgr hann vötn ok við,
glygg hann óaz, en gumna eigi,
ok yrkir á sól til saka.

Who is that, the great one, who passes over the earth? He swallows waters and wood, he fears the wind, but not men, and sets upon the sun to harm [it].

Not all the riddling stanzas fit this pattern, nor do all the stanzas of eddic wisdom poetry, but certainly, some are comparable in structure and form. Again, the eddic stanzas provide information authoritatively, while the riddles pose a challenge before the information can be won and the object in question reassessed. Yet once again the eddic poems provide only dogmatic knowledge, while the riddles offer a deeper exploration, on a more human level and in a way more personal to the solver.

Rather than establishing order, the riddles subvert it before their resolution is reached, and “multiply existence” still further. Where *Grímnismál* is interested in listing superlatives (stanza 44), riddles prefer to challenge their audience with comparatives, pushing the boundaries of known experience. Obsidian, a dark-colored volcanic glass, seems in its portrayal in Riddle 16 to make possible the impossible, extending previously accepted standards and possessing seemingly opposing properties at one and the same time, in a description which also highlights the special qualities of the objects to which the obsidian is compared (lines 4–7):

Horni harðara, hrafni svartara,
skjalli hvítara, skapti réttara.

Harder than horn, blacker than the raven, whiter than the
membrane of an egg, straighter than the shaft.

While hardness, blackness, and straightness (or smoothness) are all primary characteristics of obsidian, they are presented in such a way as to obscure the straightforwardness of the clue. The black/white paradox is explained in the prose solution, as Heiðrekr responds: “þat er hrafntinna, ok skein á hana sólargeisli” (that is obsidian, and a sunbeam shining on it).⁷⁷ This quality, too, may well have seemed obvious to medieval Icelanders, who would have been familiar with

obsidian glittering in the sun on lava fields or polished for use as mirrors. The comparison to “skjall” (the membrane of an egg) is perhaps particularly mystical or “wondrous,” as it is one also used by *Gylfaginning* in its account of the water in the well at the foot of Yggdrasill, which prevents the tree from rotting and “er svá heiligt at allir hlutir þeir sem þar koma í brunninn verða svá hvítir sem hinna sú er skjall heitir, er innan liggr við eggskurn” (is so sacred that all those things which come into the well become as white as that which is called *skjall*, which lies within eggshell).⁷⁸ Once again, the solution proves to be a familiar object, which the riddle reevaluates as exciting and thought-provoking. Ultimately, the curiosities of the clue are resolved: the riddle plus its solution demonstrate how something *can* be both “blacker than raven” and “whiter than the membrane of an egg.” The enigma is gone, but understanding and a fresh perspective take its place.

The trait of listing qualities that describe the object exactly but disguise the fact they are doing so is perhaps pushed furthest in those riddles which employ the ironically-named poetic device *ofljóst* (too obvious). There is one such riddle in the *Hervarar saga* collection (Riddle 35) and a further three found copied in toward the end of several manuscripts of the Y version of the so-called *Laufás Edda*, an early seventeenth century redaction of Snorri’s *Edda*.⁷⁹ These riddling clues rely on the substitution of homonyms, such as *eggdauða menn* (men killed by the sword [lit. “edge-dead men”] for *valr* [the slain/falcon]), a play on words which appears in both Riddle 35 of the *Hervarar saga* collection and the first of the *Laufás Edda* riddles. It is significant that the latter stanzas, in which each line reveals the name of a bird, are appended to the *þulur* section of *Skáldskaparmál*, suggesting that they were thought to fulfill a similar role to the *þulur*—that of providing different ways of referring to their subject—though the riddles involve an extra cognitive step rather than being straightforward *heiti* or synonyms.

In this sphere of listing and naming, the eddic wisdom poem *Alvíssmál*, which shares the wisdom-contest framework, is also pertinent. Here the protagonists are the god Þórr and the dwarf Alvis (lit. “All-wise” or, to adopt Lindow’s attractive suggestion, “Know-it-all”⁸⁰), the latter of whom is doomed to lose a head-ransom contest in which he does not know he is participating. Þórr questions him not to judge his suitability as a son-in-law, as the dwarf believes, but to stall him until the sun comes up and he is turned to stone. Þórr’s questions are phrased similarly to Óðinn’s in *Vafþrúðnismál* and cover a similar range of subjects relating to the universe and natural phenomena, but Þórr (somewhat like Vafþrúðnir) seeks only names for things, not further details about them.

Like the *pulur*, *Alvíssmál* is concerned with lists of different terms for the same object or phenomenon, though unlike the *pulur*, in *Alvíssmál* the words are purportedly from the different languages “heimi hveriom í” (in each of the worlds), namely of the Æsir, Vanir, giants, dwarfs, elves, men, and Hel (“í helio”).⁸¹ The poem’s subject matter has considerable overlap with that of the riddles and the other wisdom poems, including terms for the earth and sky, sun and moon, clouds and wind, calm and sea, fire and wood, night, and barley and ale.⁸² To some extent the *heiti*, certain of which are *hapax legomena*, are concerned with the characteristics of the things they describe, such as “eygló” (ever-glowing) for the sun (16/4), “driúpan sal” (dripping hall) for the sky (12/6) or “gneggiuð” (neither) for the wind (20/3). This is particularly the case for kenning-like compound words such as “dagsefa” (day-soother) for the calm (22/5), or “Dvalins leica” (Dvalinn’s plaything, playmate or tricker), again for the sun (16/3).⁸³ These circumlocutions employ strategies comparable to some of the riddles, where particular properties are isolated and foregrounded, in some cases misleadingly (one thinks “horse” before “wind” as a referent for “neigher,” for example) or requiring external knowledge to comprehend (e.g. that the sun would turn Dvalinn to stone).⁸⁴ However, others are simply alternate words for the same thing: none of the words for ale, for example, concerns its effects, ill or otherwise, in contrast to the riddles and poems discussed above. Interesting things can certainly be deduced from these words and, to some extent, their attribution to the various races: the elves seem to delight in and praise the beauty of the world, while the Vanir have a penchant for words with which they alliterate (i.e. that start with the letter *v*).⁸⁵ The stanzas fail, however, to build into any striking or sustained insights about the things they refer to.

Alvíssmál, the *pulur*, and the riddles all reveal an interest in the multifaceted natures of things and a delight in creative word-play. For the *Hervarar saga* riddles, individually and collectively, this delight is extended beyond words and phrases to unexpected and witty vignettes of the world and its contents, perspectives that, when gleaned and appreciated, extend beyond mere wit and into the realm of deeper wisdom.

RIDDLES: BEYOND EDDIC

The riddles are both like and unlike eddic wisdom poetry. In general, they are like them in aspects of their language, form, and subject matter. Riddles and wisdom poetry share interests in the world, its contents, names for things, and human behavior. The concerns, or similar ones, of wisdom poetry highlighted by Bloomfield and others

—to convey mythological, cosmological, and cosmogonic information, and by doing so to make the world more comprehensible—can also be found in the riddles. It is conversely arguable that eddic poetry can be like the riddles in its allusive, provocative use of language that encourages its audience to explore multiple avenues of suggestion. Brittany Schorn asserts: “in the context of eddic wisdom poetry, all knowledge ultimately derives from first hand personal experience. As such it is subjective and fundamentally limited by individual consciousness.”⁸⁶ The riddles, too, operate on multiple levels, opening up new avenues of investigation from another’s experience of the world for those who wish to pursue them, while offering more superficial descriptions and amusements for those who, like *Heiðrekr* perhaps, do not or cannot delve deeper.

Yet there are also crucial differences between them. Eddic poetry is often concerned with a cosmic scale: the universe, its creation, gods and other supernatural beings. “Facts” are presented, though in an often allusive manner, but an air of enigma inevitably remains. The mysteries they describe are not fully explicable. The riddles, on the other hand, tend to focus on smaller details and/or everyday experiences. As a result, their referents are already closer to human experience. They are physical or at least observable, not merely abstract. The bathetic contrast between the grand imagery used by certain riddles and their lowly subjects is playful and humorous. But the riddles are on the whole also effective in relating to real objects their audiences would have encountered and explaining them not through their mysterious origins but in ways that can be worked through and grasped.⁸⁷ This perhaps goes some way toward explaining their significance in the encyclopedic *Hauksbók* and other, later manuscripts where they are divorced from their saga context and copied alongside theological, computistical, and other works of early natural science.⁸⁸

The riddles ostensibly aim to confuse and mislead, rather than to explain. But, to borrow A. J. Wyatt’s phrase, “the more misleadingly accurate and accurately misleading, the better.”⁸⁹ And as Donatus has it, riddles reveal the “*occultam similitudinem rerum*” (hidden similarity of things).⁹⁰ All of them tell truths about their subjects, which, once recognized, can be evaluated in a new way. Instead of providing mythological, social, or other cultural information directly, they interrogate their audience and, in turn, encourage their audience to interrogate the world. They thus certainly impart information about the state of the world and about relating to it, but one aspect of this information is that the world is quirky, unpredictable, and open to exploration.

The riddles at first alienate, subverting expectation and

defamiliarizing the everyday. The angle they take on the world is either unusual or a distorted, disguised version of the conventional. They do not completely collapse or destabilize boundaries, however, as Maranda would have it; rather they expand them. Ultimately, the *Hervarar saga* riddles are unifying and enlightening: they allow their audience to solve them, and in their saga context do not maintain suspense for long, accompanied as they are by their solutions as part of the plotline. The world thus rightly oriented, the riddling stanzas provide both delight in linguistic and cognitive trickery and fresh ways of envisaging and describing human experience: in short, they contain both wit and wisdom.

DEVOTIONAL POETRY AT THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES IN ICELAND

Martin Chase

Two important landmarks in Old Norse scholarship appeared in 2005: the now classic *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, edited by Carol Clover and John Lindow, was reprinted by the Medieval Academy of America,¹ and Blackwell published the *Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, edited by Rory McTurk, in the *Companions to Literature and Culture* series.² These works are milestones that reflect recent scholarly activity, provide up-to-date bibliography, and suggest directions for future study. For all the comprehensive and diverse wealth of information and commentary they contain, however, there is one significant and regrettable lacuna: there is no treatment in either volume of the Icelandic devotional poetry of the late Middle Ages. This is by no means to suggest that the editors have been remiss: there is simply very little to report on current—or indeed—any scholarship in this area of the discipline.

The very approximate *termini ante* and *post quem* for this body of poetry are the composition of the long poem *Lilja* in the late fourteenth century and the publication of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson's *Vísnaþók* in 1612.³ *Lilja*, perhaps the most famous Icelandic poem of all time, has long been regarded as marking the end of the tradition of skaldic poetry, and it is the stopping point for Roberta Frank's chapter on "Skaldic Poetry" in the Clover/Lindow volume⁴ as well as Katrina Attwood's on "Christian Poetry" in the *Blackwell Companion*.⁵ In fact, *Lilja* has, in respect to its form as well as its content, at least as much in common with the late medieval devotional poems that follow and imitate it as it does with the earlier Christian *drápur* composed in the traditional skaldic *dróttkvætt* metre that it turns away from. *Lilja* is as much the beginning of something new as it is the last gasp of what went before. Whether *Lilja* should be considered "skaldic" is debatable, but it has been assured a place in that context by its inclusion in Finnur Jónsson's *Skjaldedigtning*,⁶ the monumental edition that for a century now has defined—however arbitrarily—the skaldic corpus, and subsequently in the new Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages series.⁷ Because Finnur closed the skaldic canon to poetry dating from later than 1400, much of the devotional poetry of the fifteenth century has remained unedited and

largely unknown.

Vísnaðók, the boundary at the other end of this genre, is one of the first books printed by Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson in 1612 at his see in Hólar. It is a large collection of vernacular devotional poetry—some 200 poems altogether—that Guðbrandur considered appropriate for reading in post-Reformation Iceland. It contains a number of favorite medieval poems, including a version of *Lilja* (slightly bowdlerized to accommodate post-Reformation sensibilities), poems by later Catholic poets like the martyred bishop Jón Arason (the original owner of the press on which the book was printed), and many newly commissioned poems, notably by Einar Sigurðsson,⁸ Sigfús Guðmundsson, Magnús Jónsson, and Ólafur Einarsson. The poems of *Vísnaðók* exhibit a variety of styles: there are “rímur” based on biblical narratives, poems on wisdom themes, and introspective meditative poems.⁹ That Bishop Guðbrandur printed this large collection is an indication of both popular interest in devotional poetry, including pre-Reformation poems, and his ecclesiastical approval of it. The publication of a second edition of *Vísnaðók* in 1748 attests to its continuing popularity.¹⁰

There have been a few bright spots in modern scholarship on this body of literature. The first was the publication of Jón Þorkelsson’s *Om digtningen på Island i det 15. og 16. århundrede (Icelandic Poetry in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries)* in 1888.¹¹ The book is divided into three parts, which deal with pre-Reformation religious poetry, *rímur* and popular poetry, and poetry by named poets from 1400–1600. It is an almost exhaustive inventory of the poetic texts and manuscripts surviving from the time and an indispensable guide to the subject. In a few instances Jón transcribes an entire poem that he considers especially important—often the only published version of the text—but more often he prints just the opening, sometimes with the concluding stanzas. Later, in the 1920s, he published anonymously the *Kvæðasafn eftir Nafngreinda Íslenzka Menn frá Miðöldum og Síðari Öldum (Poems by Named Icelanders from the Middle Ages and the Period that Followed)*.¹² The poems in this collection are somewhat cursorily edited, but many of the texts are not otherwise available.

A decade after the publication of the *Kvæðasafn*, in 1936 and 1938, Jón Helgason brought out two fascicles of his *Íslenzk Miðaldakvæði: Íslandske Digte fra Senmiddelalderen (Icelandic Poems from the Late Middle Ages)*. Jón Helgason originally planned a three-volume edition of the late medieval devotional poems. Volume 1 was to be printed in two parts: the first was to have been an authoritative edition of *Lilja* (which Jón believed belonged in this context rather than with the skaldic poetry), and part 2 would contain “poems dealing with Creation, the Fall, Redemption, and Judgment.” Sadly, Jón’s edition of

Lilja was never completed, but he did publish part 2 of volume 1, as well as volume 2 (complete in one part), which contains poems about the Blessed Virgin Mary and a variety of saints. After the publication of volume 2, the Second World War intervened, and Jón never completed the planned third volume. It was to contain about forty-four devotional poems on diverse topics. Volume 1, part 2, is 339 pages, volume 2 is 463 pages, and volume 3 would have been somewhat larger than either, so this is not an insignificant collection.¹³ These editions are, as one would expect, meticulously prepared, taking into account all the known manuscripts, including some of quite late date. Jón Helgason's discussions of the relationships between the manuscripts make instructive and fascinating reading: in many instances he demonstrates how here, as elsewhere, very late paper manuscripts can preserve a better text than parchment manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The drawback of this elegant edition is that the presentation of the texts, which preserves manuscript spelling, punctuation, and orthography, makes it a challenge for the uninitiated.

These poems have received very little attention from a literary point of view. The usefulness of Shaun Hughes's excellent chapter on "Late Secular Poetry" in the *Blackwell Companion* underlines the absence of a corresponding chapter on "Late Christian Poetry." The best treatments of this poetry as a whole are Jón Helgason's article on late medieval religious poetry in *Nordisk Kultur* 8 B,¹⁴ Stefán Einarsson's chapter on what he calls "Helgikvæði" in his *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga* (there is a much abbreviated version in the English translation),¹⁵ and Vésteinn Ólason's article on what he refers to as "Trúarkvæði" in his own more recent *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga*, volume 2.¹⁶ All of these studies, apart from the abridged translation of Stefán Einarsson's article, presuppose the ability to read either modern Danish or modern Icelandic. Because it has been discussed so little, this sub-genre has never acquired a commonly-accepted collective name. The modern term *trúarkvæði* (poems of faith), has gained currency, at least among Icelandic scholars, since its recent use in *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga*, but like *helgikvæði* (religious poems), it leaves ambiguity about the date of the poems, which may be their most distinguishing common characteristic. The earliest citation of the word *trúarkvæði* in *Orðabók Háskólans* is from 1923, when Alexander Jóhannesson used it in *Íslensk tunga í fornöld* in reference to *Plácítúsdrápa*, a Christian skaldic *drápa* from the twelfth century.¹⁷ Given the general lack of familiarity with the genre, a more narrowly descriptive name like "late medieval devotional poetry" may be preferable.

It is not because of its quality that this poetry has been neglected:

indeed, the best of it can compete with the best of the poetry in *Skjaldedigting*, and the worst of it is certainly not inferior to the worst. On the average, it can be said to be very much on a par. As with the Christian skaldic poetry, its subject matter has been part of the problem: it lacks the romantic appeal of the truly Nordic. Jón Helgason himself writes disparagingly:

The content of all this poetry has very little national character: it builds on the church's international treasury of apostles' *vitæ*, saints' biographies, and legends. Poets in other lands likewise wrote of Mary's joys and sorrows, and the miracles are not from the poets' own experience, but borrowed from translated collections. The poet typically relies on an edifying book, the contents of which he turns into verse.¹⁸

While this is undeniably true, the same could be said of Dante or of Chaucer. It is a question of taste rather than of quality. These poems lack the thrill of the skalds' Viking vigor, but they demonstrate how their authors, writing on the geographical periphery of medieval Europe, were nevertheless not far from the center of the intellectual currents of their age. Roberta Frank remarks in the Clover/Lindow volume that "the European context of the later secular poetry has hardly been touched,"¹⁹ and that could be repeated in spades with regard to the later Christian poetry. That this poetry shares themes and motifs with continental poetry makes it not less interesting, but more so, as it shows how firmly situated Iceland was in the literary culture of the day and challenges us to determine the points of contact.

The form of the poetry likewise reflects continental influence. Two long poems, *Barngælur*²⁰ and *Krossþulur*²¹ are in *fornyrðislag* meter, the traditional Germanic long line meter used in so many of the eddic poems; several of the *drápur*, in imitation of *Lilja*, are in the eight-line-stanza, eight-syllable-line *hrynhent* meter that came to be called *Liljulang*; but most of the poems are in a variety of complex stanza forms devised for the nonce. These meters have affinity with Latin sequences, the German *minnesang*, the Italian *canzone*, and the intricate stanza forms we see in Early Modern English works like the Sidney Psalter—as well as with Old Norse meters. No specific sources for these poetic forms have been identified, and none may ever be, but a study of analogues is needed and is sure to be rewarding.

Another reason for the neglect of this poetry is the problem of its periodization. Much of it dates from after 1550, the official date of the Protestant Reformation in Iceland, and some of it even postdates Bishop Guðbrandur's printed *Vísnaþók* of 1612. Yet this poetry in many ways has more in common with the skaldic poetry of the

fourteenth century than most of the poetry composed for the printed books of the sixteenth. Medievalist scholars naturally tend to shy away from sixteenth-century texts, yet these poems, with their pre-Reformation devotional piety and their situation in a culture of manuscripts rather than print, are undisputedly medieval and have not been of interest to early modernists. Happily, in the past few years early modernists like Margrét Eggertsdóttir²² and Kristján Eiríksson²³ have been pushing the boundaries of their interest a bit further back, and medievalists like Guðrún Nordal²⁴ have been stretching their own boundaries a few decades ahead to include the study of these poems.

Many of the poems are preserved in three large manuscript anthologies: Reykjavík, AM 713 4to (written no earlier than 1539); Reykjavík, AM 622 4to (written before 1549 by Gísli Jónsson, who later became Bishop of Skálholt); and Reykjavík, AM 721 4to, which appears to be slightly earlier. AM 713 and AM 622 both appear to be older than they are, and might be considered as much as a century older if they did not contain datable material. Some of the poems in these manuscripts found their way into the printed *Vísnaþók*, slightly emended so as not to conflict with Reformation dogmas, while others were undoubtedly considered too Catholic for inclusion. And there are many, many later manuscripts, often paper, which attest to the continuing popularity of the poems despite the post-Reformation piety and early modern sensibilities one might expect. They make liberal use of kennings, including mythological kennings, but these tend to be kennings in the style of those found in the *rímur*, not the kennings of skaldic poetry. The *Lexicon Poeticum*²⁵ and Rudolf Meissner's handbook of skaldic kennings²⁶ are of little help here: the more useful guide to the figurative language is Björn K. Þórolfsson's *Rímur fyrir 1600*.²⁷ Finnur Jónsson's *Ordbog til Rímur*,²⁸ Sigfús Blöndal's *Íslensk-Dönsk Orðabók*,²⁹ and the online *Orðabók Háskólans*³⁰ are likewise more useful than Johan Fritzner's *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*³¹ or the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*³² for sorting out the often arcane vocabulary.

The Appendix below lists the poems that Jón Helgason planned to include in volume 3 of *Íslensk Miðaldakvæði*. One of the most interesting among them is *Siðbót* (*Improvement of Morals* or *Reformation*), a poem of fifty-three stanzas based on the biblical story of Susanna and the elders (Daniel 13). It is found in just one manuscript, the anthology AM 713 4to. The opening and closing stanzas read as follows (alliterating syllables are printed in boldface):

1.

Bragarins vín skal **bjóða**
þí bragna sveit vil hlýða á

af því lopti ljóða
þem læst var fyr í mæðar skrá
þó fræði lykillin finnizt hjá mér varla
að efna þennan óðar sal
með orðaval
um ævintýr að spjalla.³³

I will offer the wine of poetry
if the band of heroes will listen to it
from that chamber of songs,
which previously was locked in the book of rhymes,
though the knowledge-key is scarcely found here with me
to produce from that hall of poetry
with choice of words
to tell about adventures.

53.

Hér skal óður á enda
með orða makt og Fjölnis prís
láti oss Drottin lenda
þar líkn og hjálp er öllum vís.
Skrifarann og þann skýrt hefur gómasalla
og sá með blíðu beitt hefur mik
um braginn fyr sik:
Græðarinn geymi oss alla.³⁴

Here shall the poem come to an end
with the power of words and Fjölfnir's praise
may the Lord bring us to land
where mercy and help are certain for all—
the scribe and he [who] composed the mist of the palate [i.e.
poetry]
and he [who] with gentleness has asked me
for the poem for himself [i.e. the commissioning patron]—
may the Healer preserve us all.

The form of the stanza is complex. There are eight lines, as in the traditional *dróttkvætt* stanza, but here they are of unequal length. Lines 1 and 3 are of six syllables in a falling meter, while lines 2 and 4 are of eight syllables in a rising meter. Line 5 has ten syllables in rising meter, line 6 has eight syllables in rising meter, while line 7 has just four syllables, also in rising meter, and line 8 has seven syllables: three stresses in rising meter with a feminine ending to the line. There is thus a regular interplay between rising and falling meters. The lines

are end-rhymed, with a rhyme scheme of *abab* in lines 1–4 and *cddc* in lines 5–8. Lines 1–4 are linked by alliteration as in *dróttkvætt*, line 5 alliterates internally and sometimes also alliterates with line 6. Line 6 alliterates internally and with line 7, and line 8 alliterates internally and sometimes with line 7. The three-part stanza, made up of two like parts (lines 1–2 and lines 3–4) followed by one unlike part (lines 5–8) is typical of the Italian *canzone* stanza, and modern Icelandic literary historians have given it the name *kansónuháttur*.³⁵ Variations of the form are found in English, German, Spanish, and Portuguese poetry, and it remains to be discovered how it made its way to Iceland. I have found this particular stanza form in eight late-medieval Icelandic devotional poems,³⁶ and variations on the two-part *canzone* stanza occur in many others.

Siðbót begins and ends, like many traditional *drápur*, with self-conscious references to the poet: a bid for a hearing and a request for approval and reward. The diction is replete with kennings, but as is typical of the genre, they are in the style of the kennings of the *rímur* rather than those of the *dróttkvætt*. In line 1 there is a pleonastic kenning for poetry, *bragarins vín* (the wine of poetry). Björn K. Þórólfsson lists *bragur* as a *heiti* or poetic name for *skáldskapur*, and notes that kennings for poetry often consist of a word, especially a *heiti*, for poetry in the genitive, construed with the word “wine” or other words designating wine or drink, although he cites no examples of this particular kenning.³⁷ Björn coined the term *nafnorðsaukningar* (expanded nouns) for this type of kenning, in which the entire meaning of the genitive phrase is carried by the determinant or genitive component of the kenning. In other words, the base word loses its force and the meaning of the genitive term becomes the meaning of the whole phrase.³⁸ Björn’s term *nafnorðsaukningar* reflects his opinion that the kennings are superfluous padding, expanded nouns that could just as well be contracted or collapsed. More recently, Davíð Erlingsson has made a case for their artistic merit and suggested the term *blómað mál* (florid language), because he sees in these kennings a kinship with the *geblümter Stil* of late medieval German poetry.³⁹ The kenning *bragarins vín* does not appear in Finnur Jónsson’s *Ordbog til Rímur*, although he lists a variety of other kennings for poetry that either use *vín* as a base word or *bragr* as a determinant. It is not clear why “bragarins” is definite (the indefinite *bragar* would be expected in a circumlocution like this), but there are examples of *blómað mál* where the determinant is the definite form of the word: cf. *bragarins smíð* (the making of poetry; *Bósa Rímur* V, 1)⁴⁰ and the similar phrase in the title of the poem “Bjóða vil eg þér bragsins smíð” (I want to offer you the making of poetry)⁴¹; *bragarins spíl* (the game of poetry) in “Fæðingarvísur” 1⁴² and *Ármanns Rímur* II,

343; and *bragarins lítinn hátt* (the little meter of poetry) in *Laurentiusdiktur* 57.⁴⁴ In *Siðbót*, the poet brings forth *bragarins vín* from the *loft ljóða* (sleeping chamber of song), a term that occurs in *rímur* and that has been classified as a kenning for “breast.” “Skrá mærdar” (the book, scroll, document of poetry), with its reference to a written text, is a kenning-type characteristic of late medieval Icelandic poetry. The image of the *fræðilykill* (key of knowledge) needed to unlock the book is reminiscent of Chaucer’s key of remembrance,⁴⁵ and the adverb *varla* (hardly) introduces a modesty topos not found in the skalds of old, but typical of the *ellikvæði* (poems lamenting the diminishments of old age) that were popular in the late medieval period. In line 6 the kenning *óðar sal* is another example what Finnur Jónsson and Rudolf Meissner called a “breast-kenning,”⁴⁶ though the poet here seems to have something more abstract than the human thorax in mind, and *orðaval* (choice of words, diction) is another self-conscious kenning that appears in *rímur*.

Orðaval chimes with *orðamakt* in line 2 of stanza 53. At the end of the poem, the poet has no problem with referring to his biblical retelling as *Fjölnis prís* (Óðinn’s praise) in the same breath as asking the Lord to help him guide the poem in to port (note the nautical reference) and bring it to a conclusion. Where a traditional skald would say in the last stanza that he hoped his poem had pleased the king and his men—and that it would be appropriately rewarded—the poet here asks God’s blessing on the scribe, the patron, and himself, giving us an insight into the literary scene in Iceland at this time. The mention of the scribe is especially interesting: is the poet dictating to an amanuensis, or is he referring to a scribe who will later produce copies for circulation? The poet seems to regard the commissioning patron and the scribe as collaborators in the production, if not the authorship, of the poem.

The kenning for poetry *gómasalli* is unusual. There is one other occurrence: in the invocation at the beginning of the *drápa Blómarós*, the anonymous poet says: “svo gomasallan mætti ek spjalla” (thus may I speak poetry; *Blómarós*, 8).⁴⁷ *Gómr* is a word for the palate or gums, and occurs in various kennings for mouth in skaldic poetry: cf. *góma rann* (house of the palate; Gunnlaugr ormstunga Lausavísa 1)⁴⁸ and *góma kvern* (churn of the palate; verse 2 from *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*)⁴⁹. In *rímur*, we find kennings based on *góma* like *gómas naust* (house or ship’s cabin of the palate; *Lokrur* III, 2)⁵⁰, *góma salr* (hall of the palate; *Friðþjófsrímur* V, 1)⁵¹, *Ginnungs góma haf* (the sea of Ginnung’s [the giant’s or Óðinn’s] palate; *Lokrur* IV, 21)⁵², *Grímnis góma lá* (wave of the palate of Grímnir [Óðinn]; *Lokrur* III, 44)⁵³, and *Gunnlaðar góma lá* (wave of the palate of Gunnlað [giant’s daughter]; *Grettisrímur* III, 59)⁵⁴; see also *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 198. The word *salli*

means “fine powder, dust, milled flour,” and by analogy, “fine mist.”

This seems to be an allusion to the story Snorri Sturluson tells in his treatise *Skáldskaparmál* about the god Óðinn’s theft of the mead of poetry from the dwarves: after drinking the mead, Óðinn changed himself into an eagle and flew away. When he reached Ásgarðr, the home of the gods, they put out vats for him to spit the mead into, but because he was so terrified by the pursuing giant Suttungr, *hann sendi aptr suman mjöðinn* (he sent some of the mead out backwards) and this is called *skáldfífla hlutur*, the portion of hack-poets.⁵⁵ In the *rímur*, where in contrast to traditional skaldic poetry, the poets affect modesty and speak disparagingly of their work, we find the euphemistic kenning *leir arnar* (clay of the eagle) for the eagle’s excremental dribble, and, in a further level of euphemism, *sand arnar* (sand of the eagle). The *salli* of *gómasalli* may be a *heiti* related to this kenning or a collapsed version of it. Or it may be related to a kenning used by the late-tenth-century skald Eilífr Guðrúnarson, who says in a fragment of a poem on Jarl Hákon, *sáð Sónar grær oss á sefreinu orða* (the seed of Son [the vat of the mead of poetry] grows on my soul-land of words).⁵⁶ The association of poetry with seed or grain also occurs in a kenning in another tenth-century fragmentary poem, *Berudrápa*, by the famous Egill Skallagrímsson. Egill’s kenning is *qrð arnar kjafta* (seed of the mouth of the eagle).⁵⁷ Björn K. Þórolfsson thinks that these kennings show a progressive development of the image of Óðinn’s panicky discharge from clay to sand, then grain, and finally seed. In late *rímur*, the process moves even a step further and uses words for “bread” in kennings like *leifur* [= *hleifur*] *miðjungs* (loaf of the dwarf).⁵⁸ Still another possibility is association with the analogous meaning of the word *salli* (fine rain or mist) and the corresponding verb *salla* (to mist or rain finely). If this is the meaning, *gómasalli* could refer to the crumbs of poetry that fall from the poet’s mouth, or to the fine spray of saliva he spews forth as he declaims the poem.

The biblical story of Susanna and the elders enjoyed wide popularity in Germany, Scandinavia, and England in the years leading up to and following the Protestant Reformation. It tells the story of a beautiful and virtuous young wife, who is accosted by two elders who ogle her as she bathes in her garden. Susanna spurns their advances and flees, and when her cries attract a crowd, the elders claim they have caught her committing adultery with a young man. At her trial, the young prophet Daniel comes to her rescue: he interrogates the accusers separately, and their conflicting versions of what they say they saw reveals their perjury. A particularly tantalizing analogue of *Siðbót* that merits further research is *The Pistel of Swete Susan*, an anonymous English stanzaic narrative poem from the end of the

fourteenth century that tells the same story. The meter of this poem does not count syllables, and the alliteration is within the line, but its tripartite *canzone*-like stanza form is an expanded version of the *Siðbót* stanza: it has two quatrains where *Siðbót* has couplets in the first two sections, and the shortened line 9, part of a bob-and-wheel pattern, is reminiscent of *Siðbót*'s shortened line 7:

1.

Þher was in **B**abiloine a **bi**ern in þat **borw** riche
þat was a **J**euw **j**entil, and **J**oachim he hight.
He was so lele in his lawe þer lived non hym liche.
Of alle riches þat **renke** arayed he was riht.
His innes and his **or**chardes were with a **dep** dich,
Halles and **her**bergages **heigh** uppon on **heih**t:
To seche thoru þat **ci**té ther nas non sich
Of erbes and of **her**beri so **avenauntliche** i-**diht**
That **day**,
Withinne the sercle of sees,
Of erberi and **ale**es,
Of all maner trees,
Sothely to say.⁵⁹

Another representative poem from Jón Helgason's list, perhaps somewhat better known, is *Dæglur*, also found in AM 713 4to. *Dæglur*, as the name implies, is a kind of morning hymn. This poem uses a stanza of six end-rhymed lines of four stresses, with a feminine ending in the odd-numbered lines and a masculine ending in the even-numbered. The following stanza is one of six in a sequence praising the Blessed Virgin Mary.

45.

Vindur ok leiftur, vatn ok mýrar
 veglegir sandar, gróður ok korn
 fuglar, gras, sem fjaðrir dýrar
 fiskur, málmur, ok hagleg horn
 blekið ok pennar ok bækur skýrar
 börkur ok lim sem letrin forn.⁶⁰

Storm and lightning, water and moors
 splendid sands, vegetation and grain,
 birds, grass, and precious feathers,
 fish, metal, and artful horn,
 ink and pens and lucid books,

bark and foliage, and ancient letters.

The ultimate source of this inexpressibility topos is a widely imitated Latin poem by Peter Comestor, *Si fieri posset*, but the immediate source may well be stanza 93 of *Lilja*:

93.

Hrærð af list, þó at hvers mannz verði,
hold ok bein at tungum einum—
vindur, leiptur, grænar grundir,
grös ilmandi, duft ok sandar,
hagl ok drif, sem fjaðrir fugla,
fiskar, dýr, sem holt ok mýrar,
hár ok korn, sem heiðar stjörnur,
hreistr, ull, sem dropar ok gneistar—

Moved by artistry, even if each man's
flesh and bone become only tongues
wind, lightning, green fields,
sweet-smelling grass, dust and sand,
hail and snow, and feathers of birds,
fish, animals, and woods and moors,
hair and grain, and bright stars,
scales, wool, and drops and sparks.⁶¹

We see in the *Dæglur* stanza another example of a reference to *written* texts in the devotional poems. In the midst of long catalogue of all the aspects of nature that praise Mary (storm and lightning, water and moors, splendid sands, vegetation and grain, birds, grass, and precious feathers, fish, metal, and artful horn) the poet mentions, in lines 5 and 6, “blekið ok pennar ok bækur skýrar, / börkur ok lim sem letrin forn” (ink and pens and lucid books, bark and foliage, and ancient letters), a clear acknowledgement of the importance of books and writing.

The “Heimsósómi” poems deal with the theme of the mutability and inconstancy of this world, a theme that was as popular in Iceland as elsewhere at the end of the Middle Ages. The “Heimsósómi” from AM 714 4to, from about 1600, opens with some traditional kennings for poetry: “Suttungs sónar gildi” (the drink of the giant’s vat) and “bragnings milska” (the blended liquor of poetry). There is an allusion to the Edda (probably the *Snorra Edda*, given the kennings for poetry). Other kennings are clear reference to the poem as a written composition: “mærðar kver” (quire of poetry) and “bókin mín” (my book).

1.

Suptungs sónar gildi
seggjum færi eg hér
verðr ei sem eg vildi
vandað mæðar kver,
eddan mín er öll í frá,
bókin mín, sem bezta kann
bragnings milsku ljá.⁶²

The drink of Suttung's Són [the giant's vat]
[that] I would bring here to men
does not turn out as I would have liked;
the carefully prepared quire of poetry,
my “edda,” is completely finished—
my book, which best can
deliver the blended liquor of poetry.

Krosskvæði af Kaldaðarneskrossi is a poem composed in the style of the *rímur* that narrates the history (including its purchase in Rome and transportation to Eyraðakki) of the crucifix at the pilgrim shrine of Kaldaðarnes, just south of Reykjavík, and the miracles associated with it. The poem appears to date from the end of the fifteenth century, not long before Bishop Gissur Einarsson had the miraculous cross dismantled in 1548. Immediately upon razing this popular shrine, Bishop Gissur was struck down with an illness and died. His successor, Gísli Jónsson, had the cross chopped up and burned in retaliation, but fragments and ashes were collected as relics, and devotion to the cross remained fervent long after the Reformation. This poem, which contains much that would be of interest to hagiographers, is also found in AM 713 4to (49–51), as well as in two seventeenth-century copies.⁶³ This poem is exceptional in that it is firmly situated in the history and geography of Iceland rather than being translated or adapted from a foreign source.

Barngælur (or *Barngælubálkur*, as it names itself in the second to last stanza) is a long poem of ninety-four stanzas in *fornyrðislag*, the meter associated with the wisdom poetry of the Poetic Edda. It is a collection of prayers, wisdom sayings, and good advice to be chanted over an infant or a little girl. The poem begins with a prayer that the child will thrive and mature, then develops into a discourse on the virtuous wife that echoes Proverbs 31:10–31, and concludes with a touch of folk magic:

92.

Barngælubálk
bragnar kalla

þetta kvæði,
það er harðla stutt.
Spak munu verða
sprunda arfi
ef það er þrysvar
yfir kveðit.

93.

Mál skal svá endast
meyjan fríða
géf ek þik guði
gamla og unga
enn at endaðri
ævi þinni
Christur vitji þín
kvæðit er úti.⁶⁴

“ ‘Children’s rhyme’
men call
this poem
that is very short.
Wise [or calm] will be
the child [heir] of woman
if it is thrice
sung over her.

The poem must thus come to an end
pretty girl
I give you to God
old and young
and at the end
of your life
may Christ come to you;
the poem is finished.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a text that exists in three slightly varying versions. It is called, depending on the version, “Enska vísan,” “Svenska vísan,” or “Spanska vísan.” The titles attest to contact with the literature of England, Scandinavia, and the continent. The most complete version of the text is “Enska vísan,” (London, BL Add. 11,177, a seventeenth-century Icelandic manuscript). The first part of this strange little narrative is reminiscent of the English *Sir Orfeo*. A young knight and his beloved promise one another they never will part, but one day, while he is away at court, “death” personified comes and tells her she must leave the world. She reluctantly

accompanies him, and when they come to where her lover lies, the personification becomes a flying dragon that grips her in its claw. The knight shoots the monster down with an arrow and is reunited with his lady, whose pallor alarms him. She tells him he must take her to the beautiful land where there is nothing to fear, and he carries her for seven months. They cross a long bridge, cold ice, a thick forest, and burning sands. Finally they come to a beautiful plain, where they are met by angels and apostles. A “beautiful man” (*einn fríður maður*) named “Sunday” comes forth and asks the knight to hand over the woman, which he gladly does. In the final two stanzas, the *fríður maður* identifies himself as “the God you believe in.” He tells the knight that after a three-day leave, he must return to the world and tell of his travels, and we suddenly realize that this “romance” is a charming (if not totally coherent) little allegory about the humanity and divinity of Christ, one that mixes folk elements with Christian theology.

There is much to be done with these poems: texts to be edited, manuscripts to be contextualized, poetic diction to be analyzed, and language that is neither Old Norse nor Modern Icelandic to be codified. Historians of Iceland call the fifteenth century *Enska öldin* (the English century).⁶⁵ It was a time when commerce between Iceland and England, especially the stockfish and the wool trade, flourished. There were diplomatic and ecclesiastical ties, too, and from 1426–1437 an Englishman, John Craxton, was bishop of both Hólar and Skálholt, the two episcopal sees in Iceland. We need to reflect more about what this means for literature. Einar G. Pétursson⁶⁶ and Peter Jorgensen⁶⁷ published studies in the 1960s and 70s showing that Icelanders translated *exempla* from the Middle English *Handlyng Synne* and *Gesta Romanorum*, and both suggested that this is just the tip of the iceberg and that further study is needed. Since that time there has been much good work on the relationship between French and Icelandic literature, but little on the English connection. I hope that the rising generation of medievalists will take up this challenge.

APPENDIX: JÓN HELGASON’S PRELIMINARY PLAN FOR *ÍSLENZK MIDALDAKVÆÐI* 3⁶⁸

The first numeral following each poem title indicates the number of lines per stanza; the second indicates the total number of stanzas in the poem. Items marked with an asterisk are extant only in manuscripts.

- ***Heimsgalli**, Sjáðu mig hinn sanni guð⁶⁹ 8 × 14
- Boðorðavísur**, Sjálfur guð með sinni náð⁷⁰ 8 × 25
- Boðorðavísur**, Dikt vil eg dýran hefja⁷¹ 7 × 44

- ***Boðorðadiktur**, Dikt eg ætla vm dyrd ok frid⁷² 5 × 93
- ***Siðbót**, Bragarins vín skal bjóða⁷³ 8 × 53
- ***Syndavísur**, Mária drottning mild og skær⁷⁴ 8 × 40
- Fríðarbón**, Hæstur bid eg þig himna tigge⁷⁵ 6 × 50
- Eitt Kvæði af sjó dauðligum Syndum**, Mildur drottinn
myskunn þín⁷⁶ 8 × 20
- Davíðs diktur**, Heyr mig himna styrir⁷⁷ 10 × 30
- ***Vér lofum þann guð**⁷⁸ 9 × 5
- Lögbrotsvísur**, Hæstr guð í himna rann⁷⁹ 8 × 43
- ***Dæglur**, Gef eg mig i dag⁸⁰ 6 × 61
- Sankt Jóhannesvísur**, Nu er su hin mirka natt i burt liden⁸¹
(irregular, 9 stanzas)
- Krosskvæði af Kaldaðarneskrossi**, Sjálfur guð með sóma
nægð⁸² 8 × 45
- Svenska vísan**, Svenska vísan hún er sig svo löng⁸³ 5 × 10
- ***Enska Vísan**, Enska vísan hún er sig svo löng⁸⁴ 5 × 18
- ***Spanska vísan**, Spanska vísan hún er svo löng⁸⁵ 5 × 15
- ***Barngælubálkur**, Od vil eg yrkia⁸⁶ 8 × 94
- Michaelsflokkur**, Óðar gef þú upphaf⁸⁷ 8 × 66
- Heimsósómi**, Mörg er mannsins pína,⁸⁸ 7x 25
- Heimsósómi**, Hygg eg heldur seggjum,⁸⁹ 8 × 26
- ***Hugraun**, Hver sem treystir heiminn í,⁹⁰ 7 × 25
- Heimsósómi Skáld-Sveins**, Hvað mun veröldin vilja⁹¹ 10 × 16
- ***Heimsósómi**, Suptungs sonar gildi,⁹² 7 × 40
- ***Deila karls og kerlingar**,... rofit þitt reikar fjón
(fragmentary)⁹³ 4 × 14
- Kvæði um Ögmund biskup**, Bragsmið er mér bágt að næra⁹⁴
- Ellikvæði Jóns Hallssonar**, Í æsku en unga kære⁹⁵ 8 × 22
- Skaufhalabálkur** (Svartur Þórðarson), Hefur í grenjum,⁹⁶ 8 × 42
- ***Kolbrúnarvísur**, Íþróttir þær eg átta⁹⁷ 8 × 21
- Háttalykill Lofts**, Flesta gleðr falds rist⁹⁸ 8 × ?
- ***Allra kappa kvæði**, Lesið er flest af lýða drótt⁹⁹ 10 × 13
- ***Fræða spil um fróða klerk**¹⁰⁰ 8 × 9
- ***Hnakkakúlukvæði**, Tyrns af tunna tappa lad¹⁰¹ 9 × 9
- ***Messudagavísur**, Drottinn vor er dýrstur öllum¹⁰² 4 × 21
- ***Hlýða skaltu hörn príúð**¹⁰³ 8 × 25
- Fragmentary love poems from Reykjavík, AM 155 b 8vo**:¹⁰⁴
... Fénga eg með frómleik nú 9 × 5 (stanza 1 missing)
Vil eg um væna vella nipt 9 × 10 (incomplete)
- Hef eg ei hróðrar efni**¹⁰⁵ 7 × 8
- Ymu gusturinn greiði**¹⁰⁶ 7 × 9
- Skemta vildi eg skýrri menja þóllu**¹⁰⁷ 7 × 7
- Bóndi á sér dóttur þá**¹⁰⁸ 6 × 5

Eg vil blanda boðnar sund¹⁰⁹ 7 × 3

Vintur og frost þat komur með ís¹¹⁰ 8 × 3

Óðins milsku ætla eg fljóðum að smiða¹¹¹ 7 × 20

*Gátur¹¹²

LOVE AND DEATH IN THE ICELANDIC BALLAD

Paul Acker

Recently I was asked to give a lecture on love and death in some genre of Old Norse literature, and it struck me that the topic was exemplified remarkably well in the genre of traditional ballads, whether Icelandic, Danish, Scottish, or Appalachian; there can be few more notable examples of *Liebestod* than, for example, the “Ballad of Barbara Allen,” in which the heroine says to the hero, “Young man, I think you’re dying,” at which point he “turn’d his face unto the wall.” She leaves him to die, but as the church bells ring, she sums up the matter: “Since my love died for me today, / I’ll die for him tomorrow.”¹ In the Appalachian versions (but not the British ones), a rose growing from his grave and a briar from hers intertwine above the church, uniting them, or at least their floral incarnations, after death. It is a sublime conceit that was among the first ballad motifs I was exposed to in my own experience, listening to my seventh grade music teacher sing “Barbry Allen” as she strummed her own accompaniment on an autoharp. Growing up within earshot of the sixties folk revival, I also heard ballads played by Joan Baez, English groups like Pentangle, and on rare occasion, Bob Dylan; he sang a version of “Barbara Allen” in 1962 at the Gaslight in New York City.²

Among Scandinavian ballads, the Icelandic ballads in particular further sharpen the focus on love and death in that they consist primarily of the subtypes known as chivalric ballads and supernatural ballads. In contrast with Danish and Faroese ballads, there are virtually no heroic or mythological ballads preserved in Iceland which would by their nature address other issues.³ It is usually thought that another genre, the *rímur*, took over these heroic and mythological functions in late medieval and early modern Icelandic verse.

The so-called medieval ballads were not copied down in Scandinavia until the early modern period, in Denmark in about 1550 in the famous Heart Book (Copenhagen, Royal Library MS Thott 1510 4to), then printed in Denmark in 1591 by Anders Sørensen Vedel. A second edition of Vedel in 1655 seems to have inspired the Icelanders to copy down their ballads for the first time in Gissur Sveinsson’s manuscript from 1665, which is dated in its colophon.⁴ Gissur also included literary translations of some of the Danish ballads printed by Vedel, alongside the traditional Icelandic ballads which he had

collected. Given their late preservation in writing, it is always a question just how medieval the Icelandic ballads are in their outlook.⁵ One might ask then whether the ballads address love and death in ways significantly different from indisputably medieval Icelandic genres. The Eddic legends of Sigurd and Brynhild, for example, present a major example of *Liebestod*, with Brynhild lying down to die beside Sigurd's corpse. They even supply some surprising exaggerations, such as when Brynhild leaves her chamber door open so her sorrow can be heard throughout the town, or Sigurd grieves so hard his chainmail splits apart.⁶ And yet, with their dragon-slaying and kin-killing, these Eddic poems of love and death constitute at the same time a major example of heroic legend—the greatest epic since Homer, as William Morris used to view it.

To approach this question I will consider two ballads based on known medieval material, *Gunnars kvæði* and *Tristrams kvæði*.⁷ As Robert Cook has argued recently, the first section of *Njáls saga*, concerning Gunnar and Hallgerðr, is in part a “failed romance.” Cook's attempt to highlight this feature is illuminating, but one must still admit that *Njáls saga* is also about many other things, such as law, moderation, feuding, male friendship and so on. *Gunnars kvæði*, the only Icelandic ballad based on a family saga, brings into high relief some of the same features that Cook's analysis does. But I would argue that it is ballad narrative convention that operates most strongly here, altering the saga narrative, guiding the economical selection of two key episodes, the leap between them, and the lingering by incremental repetition on each episode. Not surprisingly for anyone who knows *Njáls saga* (and everyone in Iceland did know and still does know the saga; students read it in high school), the two episodes selected are Gunnar's slapping Hallgerðr after she has indulged in thievery⁸ and Hallgerðr's later refusal to give Gunnar a strand of her hair for his bowstring to defend himself, precisely because he had slapped her those many years before.⁹ *Gunnars kvæði* introduces the married couple very briefly, with the telling detail that “þeirra var ekki lund að jafni”¹⁰ (their temperaments were not the same). Then, on a certain occasion, Gunnar asks Hallgerðr:

5.

“Hvaðan koma Hallgerði ostar,
þeir eru so góðra kosta?”

“Wherefrom, Hallgerd, came to thee
These cheeses of fine quality?”

(Cf. *Njáls saga*: kom innar ostr ... Gunnar ... spurði Hallgerði,
hvaðan þat kœmi¹¹ [she brought in cheese ... Gunnar ... asked her

where it had come from].)

She answers:

6.

“Víða koma oss konum ostar,
mér gefast þeir af ljúfum losta.”

“From far and wide do come to me
such gifts as these, and willingly.”

(Cf. *Njáls saga*: “... víða koma Hallgerði bitlingar”¹² [... from far and wide, tidbits come to Hallgerðr].)

Hallgerðr’s reply incrementally repeats Gunnar’s question: whence came those cheeses? Thence came those cheeses—something my current translation emulates if it does not quite precisely manage to do, for which I can only ask sympathy for the attempt to write serious poetic couplets around the word “cheese.” Gunnar takes two stanzas to get up the gumption to call Hallgerðr a thief and then he slaps her face in the third stanza. Seasons pass in a single stanza until Gunnar is attacked at home by his enemies. He asks Hallgerðr for the famous strand of hair for his bow three times in (incrementally repeated) succession. She denies him, reminding him of the slap, and the narrator closes the sequence in the way that Hallgerðr had done in the saga passage: she would not lend him the hair even though his life depended on it, hung from it like a thread, or indeed, a strand of hair. Gunnar is harmed in one stanza and lies dead in the next, leaving us to conjure up the missing Hallgerðr who has failed to join him in death; the ballad is thus more about absent love and present death than simply love and death combined.

Wondering if one could determine what manuscript version of the saga the ballad drew upon, I found that Hallgerðr’s first reply, “From far and wide cheeses come to us women,” echoes a particular manuscript variant reading: “víða koma Hallgerði bitlingar” (from far and wide tidbits come to Hallgerðr). According to the Íslenzk Fornrit edition, the reading is found in MS Reykjavík, AM 163 d fol. and other late paper manuscripts.¹³ In AM 163 d fol., the phrase is marked in the margin with a letter M for *málshátt*, meaning proverb; the saying was considered proverbial, and indeed was marked as such by Jonas Rugman.¹⁴ The manuscript has been dated 1650–82, which is to say, about the same time period that the ballad was written down, in the earliest ballad manuscript, dated 1665.¹⁵ The line reading could well be earlier, but the late, post-medieval date would not be surprising: the most famous family saga in Iceland was turned into a ballad at a

time when the ballad traditions, likely first imported from Norway and Denmark in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were thoroughly established in Iceland (and before they started to fade). The ballad almost writes itself, and it pares down the original to a balanced exemplum of (thwarted) love and death.

In *Gunnars kvæði* we have two adults, a husband and wife; indeed, the ballad pares down the *dramatis personae* of the saga to just these two, one who slaps and one who is slapped, and then one who needs help and one who denies it. In Iceland, women seem to have been the main carriers of ballad tradition, and a woman's focus is often in evidence.¹⁶ We might ask how that can be so in this account of such a famously bad wife and her lethal reaction to being slapped. Medieval conduct guides elsewhere suggest that as part of good medieval husbandry, a man may strike his wife, if she needs his "correction." To take a comparative example from Middle English, the poem "How the Good Man Taught His Son" counsels that if the wife is meek and good, the man should not get angry and punish her "too outrageously."¹⁷ But the saga somewhat diffusely and the ballad much more pointedly raise a question that might be unexpected in a medieval context: how does the wife feel about it?

In fact she does not like it at all, in a profound, almost unspeakable way. Gunnar slaps her, and arguably a slap is a gendered form of physical violence, one that a man uses on a woman. In fact, Gunnar strikes his wife harder in the ballad than in the saga: he draws blood. Clearly, from his point of view, she deserves it: she has violated his honor by her domestic thievery. But the ballad does not overload the case as much as the saga does, which tells us from the outset that baby Hallgerðr has "thief's eyes," and which narrates her previous bad, even murderous marital behavior.¹⁸ She does not answer Gunnar's questions meekly (as those medieval conduct guides counsel), but rather dismissively and deceptively; she even says it is none of his business. In the saga we are told that she said "she would remember that slap and pay him back if she could."¹⁹ The ballad is more mysterious: she says nothing but keeps the memory to herself; she bides her time. The right moment for payback finally arrives; Gunnar needs her help, asking her for two strands of hair which, in the saga, she *and his mother* can twist into a bowstring. Presumably the mother's hair is not long enough, else she would surely have given it, but the ballad does not provide such a ready counterexample to female behavior. Hallgerðr asks: does anything depend upon it? When told that Gunnar's life depends upon it, she knows it is the perfect time to refuse to help her husband, to refuse to participate in the masculine violence that he is desperately involved in (his enemies are about to kill him unless he kills all of them first). Hallgerðr has been waiting

silently and now she speaks and teaches, as only she can, an unexpectedly severe lesson in gendered violence. Ultimately, if we want to know whose side the ballad is on—the man’s or the woman’s—we can ask which is the more likely lesson to be drawn from it: “don’t steal cheese,” or “don’t slap your wife, even if you think she deserves it.”

The other surviving Icelandic ballad manifestly drawn from a medieval source is *Tristrams kvæði*, based on the Norwegian/Icelandic *riddarasaga* or chivalric romance *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, itself translated, purportedly in Norway in 1226,²⁰ from the *Tristan* of Thomas of Britain, an Anglo-Norman poem dated ca. 1150–70.²¹ If Richard Wagner (in his opera) is any judge, the Tristram legend is the *Liebestod* source *par excellence*. But to get at its quintessential tragedy, one must wander through a considerable amount of interlaced narrative, depending on which version one reads. The Icelandic ballad adaptor takes everything from the final chapters of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*. Tristram has been wounded, and he asks that the Fair Isolde (*björt Ísödd*) be notified and that she come to him in a ship with blue, not black, sails:

Blátt skal merkja jómfrúr ferð
en ekki svart.²²

Blue shall mark the lady’s voyage
and not black.

The king twice denies this request and Isolde twice insists upon it. But as Fair Isolde’s ship nears the shore, the Dark Isolde (*svört Ísödd*) tells him (twice) that the sails are black, not blue.²³ While the motif of the sails is well known, both from the Greek myth of Theseus and from the Tristan romances, the particular coloration of the sails in the Icelandic ballads differs slightly but tellingly from its sources. In the French *Tristan* of Thomas, the sails should be either white or black (*L’un en ert blanc e l’autre neir*),²⁴ a sensible distinction that would be perceptible from a distance. In *Tristrams saga*, the Norwegian translation of Thomas, the sails are “gleaming white and blue striped” (*hvítum ok blám blankandi seglum*) rather than black (*svörtu*).²⁵

As most readers of Old Norse will know, there would be a problem making a distinction between the colors termed *svart* and *blár* in the classical language of the sagas, where at best the one means dull black and the other shiny black or bruise-black. Apparently it is not until the fifteenth century that the word *blár* begins to take on its current hue, the color of the sky. *The Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* entry warns that a distinction cannot always be drawn among blue, blue-black, and black, but gives a citation from a medical miscellany dated ca. 1475–

1500 stating that the Iris flower has a blue color (*Yris hefr blann lit*) and another ca. 1530–40 from a saints' legendary (*Reykjahólabók*) stating that a piece of cloth was sky-blue (*himinn-blatt*) in color.²⁶ As Shaun Hughes pointed out to me, the supposition in *Tristrams kvæði* that *blár* sails could be distinguished from *svartr* ones suggests the language of the ballad must be from no earlier than the fifteenth century, even though the ballad's source in *Tristrams saga* was written in thirteenth-century Norway.

A fifteenth-century Norwegian origin for *Tristrams kvæði* would help explain another of the ballad's features, its incidental connection with some English ballad motifs. Trade relations were so close among the Norwegians, Icelanders and English in the fifteenth century that it has been called *enska öldin*, the English Age. Accordingly there are about seventeen Icelandic ballads that can be said to be of the same type as Child ballads, among them versions (sometimes rather distant) of *Clerk Colvill*,²⁷ *Sir Aldingar*,²⁸ and *The Twa Sisters*.²⁹ A few of these ballad pairings have been studied, but another area—shared motifs between Icelandic and English or Scottish ballads—has attracted rather less attention.

To continue with *Tristrams kvæði*, when Tristram is told the sails on the approaching ship are black, he despairs in a rather flamboyant way:

Tristram snerist til veggjar,
so hart hann stakk:
heyra mátti mílur þrjár
hans hjartað sprakk.³⁰

Tristram turned him to the wall,
so hard the pain him stung;
one could hear three miles away
his heart when it was wrung.

In the *Tristrant* of Eilhart von Oberge (see further below), Tristram's weltering is described in this way:

daß taʷtt er do wol schin:
er legt daß haupt sin
uff daß bett nÿder.
im krackten all sin gelyder.
also der herlich wÿgand
starb do all zehand.³¹

One could see how this pained the knight: he laid his head down on the bed, became so tense that every joint cracked, and died.³²

It is his joints that are loud, not his breaking heart. In *Tristrams saga*, the hero again turns to the wall (*sneriz hann þegar upp til veggjar*) but only his voice is loud; he cries out in anguish, four times.³³ Among ballads, however, there is one from the Faroes that employs both motifs, wherein a heroine (Kristína litla) turns to the wall and the sound of her breaking heart can be heard from a long ways away:

Kristina lítla vendi sær
til vegginn fast,
hoyrast mátti langan veg
hennar hjarta brast.³⁴

Little Kristina turned herself
firmly to the wall,
it was heard from far away
that her heart broke.

An Icelandic ballad, “The Son’s Sorrow” (*Sonarharmur*) ends with the latter of these images, of heart-breaking:

Brestir tólf um mílur fimm
heyðust móður í hjartað inn.
—Fagurt er út að ríða.³⁵

[His] twelve outbursts, five miles away
were heard by [the] mother in [her] heart.
Fair it is to ride abroad.

This particular ballad has an added interest in that it is one of two that the Victorian artist and Norse aficionado William Morris translated and included in a calligraphic manuscript of his poems that he gave to Georgiana Burne-Jones, wife of his best friend, the painter Edward Burne-Jones.³⁶ This was at a time when Edward was having an affair with a model, and Morris’s wife Jane was having an affair with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. William and Georgiana’s relationship appears to have been chaste, but presumably he expected her to hear the distant sound of his breaking heart. In any case, we see that the many-decibele sound of a breaking heart became an acceptable ballad oddity, one perhaps anticipated by Brynhild’s loud lamentations and Sigurd’s chainmail-splitting sighs mentioned above, but really on an altogether different level.

At least one English Ballad, *Barbara Allen*, shares the other half of this love-and-death motif, that of turning to the wall. After Barbara rather famously declares “Young man, I think you’re dying,” and then reveals how he slighted her, we’re told “He turnd his face unto the

wall, / And death was with him dealing.” But an even more compelling shared motif occurs at the end of these two ballads, *Barbara Allen* and *Tristrams kvæði*.

In *Tristrams kvæði*, the fair Ísodd comes ashore, walks up from the sea to the sound of funeral bells, then kneels, red as a rose, beside the corpse and dies. All along a refrain has been saying “Þeim var ekki skapat nema skilja” (They had no other fate but to be parted). The dark Ísodd wants to keep it that way, so the bodies are buried in separate tombs, but a tree grows from each, and their branches intertwine above the church:

Runnu upp af leiðum þeirra
lundar tveir:
upp af miðri kirkjunni
mætast þeir.
—Þeim var ekki skapað nema að skilja.³⁷

From each grave there sprang up
A sapling straight,
And high above the church-roof
The branches met.
To them was nothing fated but to part.

The same motif is found at the very end of *Tristrams saga*³⁸ but not in fact in Thomas of Britain’s *Tristan*, which ends with Ysolt kissing Tristram’s dead body, stretching “her body to his body,” in a deathly parody of intercourse, and then dying herself.³⁹ Nor is the ending found in Gottfried or in the Middle English *Sir Tristrem*, but the intertwined vegetation ending is presented somewhat apologetically in the Middle High German *Tristrant* of Eilhart von Oberge dated 1170–90:

Man sagt dar ab,
und ward mir gesagt alsuozwar,
der kunig ainen rosenbusch dar
ließ setzen uff daß wib
und ainen stock uff Tristrandß lib
von ainem winreben.
die wo^vchsen ze samen eben,
daß man sie mit kainen dingen
mocht von ain ander bringen
—für wa^r hort ich daß sprechen—,
wenn wölt sü dann ab brechen:
daß macht deß tranckß krafft so.⁴⁰

I don't know if I should repeat this to you, but I heard say that the king had a rosebush planted over the woman and a fine grapevine over the man and that the two grew so tightly together they could not be separated without being broken.⁴¹

Tristrams saga as a translation abridges much but adds almost nothing to Thomas of Britain's poem, so it is surprising to see this added ending. The phenomenon has been explained in a few ways, first, that the saga did not originally have the ending but added it from the ballad, the Icelandic manuscripts of the perhaps originally Norwegian saga being rather late.⁴² Merritt Blakeslee on the other hand has suggested that the ending *was* originally present in Thomas and thus appears also in a French prose version dated 1340–1450 (MS BNF fr. 103).⁴³ The ending was soon suppressed however from manuscripts of Thomas since it seemed to offer an almost blasphemous means of having the adulterous lovers embrace forever after death.

This sublime ending either was or became a staple of ballad endings, not just in Scandinavia but also in Britain and later in Appalachia. Stanzas depicting “the briar and the rose”—as the motif is often called—conclude at least five Child ballads (“Earl Brand,”⁴⁴ “Lord Thomas and Annet,”⁴⁵ “Fair Margaret and Sweet William,”⁴⁶ “Lord Lovel,”⁴⁷ and “Lady Alice”⁴⁸) and the Appalachian but not the surviving British versions of “Barbara Allen,”⁴⁹ as in the version sung by Bob Dylan. *Tristrams kvæði*, in contrast with *Gunnars kvæði*, then, would seem to derive from a time when ballad clichés were being developed and widely disseminated, when the sound of a lovelorn heart breaking in Norway could be heard across the water in the British Isles.

APPENDIX 1: TRANSLATION OF *GUNNARS KVÆÐI*

Kvæði af Gunnari af Hlíðarendu (The Ballad of Gunnar of Hlítharend)

Scandinavian Ballad Type D355, Icelandic no. 49.

This Icelandic ballad is the only one based on a medieval saga, *The Saga of Burnt Njál*.

1.

Gunnar lived at Hlítharend;

Thereto my verses now will wend.

—At the Thing,

Better love had Brynhild for Hring.

2.

Hallgerd was his wife by name,
Their temperaments were not the same.

3.

Gunnar said to her one time:
“Hear me now, fair wife of mine.

4.

We two must speak, so answer true,
This thing I ask of you:

5.

Wherefrom, Hallgerd, came to thee
These cheeses of fine quality?”

6.

“Oft such things are given me
As gifts; thence came this cheese you see.”

7.

“People say, from far and wide,
I am not shy to speak my mind.

8.

But how it pains me now to speak
these words: my wife, you are a thief!”

9.

He struck her cheek a mighty blow;
Blood from out the wound did flow.

10.

Many seasons come and go
Hallgerd hides her thoughts below.

11.

Until one day come Gunnar’s foes
They seek to kill him at his home.

12.

Gunnar speaks with heavy heart:
“Hear me now, my lady bright.

13.

Lend me of thy hair so fine
To string this bow of mine.

14.
Lend me of thy hair so good,
Or else my foes will shed my blood.

15.
Lend me of thy hair, dear wife,
Now from it hangs my life.”

16.
“I will not lend my hair this time
For one small thing I have in mind:

17.
You struck my cheek in days gone by;
I care not if you live or die.”

18.
Hallgerd would not lend her hair
Though Gunnar’s life hung from it there.

19.
They seized Gunnar at his farm
And did to him all manner of harm.

20.
And when at last his foes had fled
Gunnar on the ground lay dead.
—At the Thing,
Better love had Brynhild for Hring.

The refrain mentions Hring and Brynhild, from a fragmentarily surviving *Hrings saga ok Tryggva*,⁵⁰ which can be reconstructed from the rímur called *Geðraunir*. Hring grows up loving his foster-sister Brynhild, but while he is away she is married to King Tryggvi. Eventually Tryggvi is killed and Hring’s wife Brynveig dies so that Hring and Brynhild can marry. Part of the refrain “á þingi” could mean either at an assembly (the Thing) or possibly at their meeting.

APPENDIX 2: KVÆÐI AF GUNNARI Á HLÍÐARENDA

Edited by Vésteinn Ólason, *Sagnadansar*, Íslenzk Rit 5 (Reykjavík, 1979), 278–9. Reprinted by permission.

1.
Gunnar hét bóndi á Hlíðarenda,
þangað vilda eg vísu venda.

Á þingi.

Betur unni Brynhildur Hringi.

2.

Kona hans hét Hallgerður að nafni,
þeirra var ekki lund að jafni.

3.

Gunnar talar við Hallgerði sína:
“Heyrðu mig, hústrú fína.

4.

Segðu mér, eg ætla þig að spyrja,
eg vil so ræðu byrja:

5.

Hvaðan koma Hallgerði ostar,
þeir eru so góðra kosta?”

6.

“Víða koma oss konum ostar,
mér gefast þeir af ljúfum losta.”

7.

“Mikið skal til almælis hafa,
eg er so djarfur að skrafa.

8.

Ekki skyldu þeir vera ófrjálsir,
þau koma mér orð úr hálsi.”

9.

Hann sló henni pústur á vanga,
blóðið varð út að ganga.

10.

Liðu so fram langar stundir,
Hallgerður þykkir í þeli undir.

11.

Loksins sóttu heim óvinir Gunnar,
þeir vildu hönum ekki lífs unna.

12.

Gunnar talar af móðugu hjarta:
“Heyrðu mig, frúin bjarta.

13.

Ljáðu mér hár þitt fína
í bogastrengi mína.

14.

Ljáðu mér hár þitt góða,
nú stár mitt líf til voða.

15.

Ljáðu mér hár þitt, laukaná,
nú liggur mitt lífið á.”

16.

“Ég ljæ þér ekki neitt hár að sinni,
það er í hyggju minni.

17.

Lítt man eg þá kinnhestinn gamla,
eg hirði ei þínum dauða að hamla.”

18.

Ekki vildi hún Hallgerður hárið ljá,
þar lá Gunnars lífið á.

19.

Tóku þeir hann Gunnar bónda
og gjörðu hönum flest til vonða.

20.

So lyktaði þeirra fundum
að Gunnar lá dauður á grundu.

Á þingi.

Betur unni Brynhildur Hringi.

Shaun F. D. Hughes

INTRODUCTION

In the census of 1703, Steinunn Finnsdóttir is listed as living in that part of the farm Höfn in Melasveit whose *bóndi* was Björn Þorsteinsson. She is said to be sixty-two years old, which would make her born somewhere around 1640–1641.¹ It is not known when she died, but Árni Magnússon notes that she was still living in Höfn in 1710.² So little is known about Steinunn that most accounts spend a great deal of space on her forebears and her descendants, and much of that interesting history is presented in Appendix 1.

Steinunn is responsible for two *rímur*, *Hyndlu rímur* based on the *sagnakvæði* *Hyndluljóð*,³ and *Snækóns rímur* based on the *sagnakvæði* *Snjáskvæði*, although in versions that do not exactly answer to any of the texts in *ÍGSVÞ*.⁴

In the seventeenth century, Steinunn stands out as the only composer of *rímur* to have based narratives upon *Märchen* (in the form of *sagnakvæði*), although the lines of demarcation between the various “genres” of *rímur* are by no means absolute.⁵ There is, for example, a great deal of overlap in subject matter and the handling of tale-types and motifs in *rímur* which are variously described as being based on romances (*riddarasögur*), *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*,⁶ stories from some of the chapbooks, and the *exempla* (*ævintýri* or *dæmisögur*).⁷ What this suggests to me is not that Steinunn “chose” the subject matter of the *sagnakvæði* from a smorgasbord of available genres, but that the *sagnakvæði* were culturally identified as literature appropriate to women and to children.⁸

We have no way of knowing if Steinunn knew of *Móðars rímur*, the only earlier poem based on a folkloric subject matter, but considering the recorded provenance of the *rímur* (they were obtained by Ólafur sýslumaður Einarsson from Vigdís Þorláksdóttir who learned them from her mother Ragnhildur Þorvaldsdóttir from Holt undir Eyjafjöllum⁹) and the argument being made here, a case can be made that they too were composed by a woman.¹⁰ The *sagnakvæði* (as well as Steinunn’s *rímur* based on them, *Móðars rímur*, and perhaps similar anonymous works) were in fact creative activity conceded to women because the male-dominated literary establishment did not consider

them as being involved in the creation or exercise of wisdom, and therefore not constituting a threat to established order. Steinunn herself seems to admit as much in her *mansöngvar*, for she has numerous references to herself as lacking wisdom or the capacity to create viable works, such as her comments about the composing of her poetry in terms of the “*Heimskra manna heðgun*”¹¹ (the conduct of foolish people [i.e. of the poet]) (*Hyndlu rímur* 2.3), or when she “*afglappa ... orðum sleppi*” (let loose the words of an idiot) (*Hyndlu rímur* 3.8), and in particular when she says she does not want to show her poem to “*virðum ... vizku ríkum*” (people powerful of thought), but much rather to those *mínum líkum*, / *mannvits lökum auðar bríkum* (like me, to the ‘boards of wealth’ [WOMEN] deficient in manly¹² understanding; *Snækóns rímur* 2.4).¹³

I

*Snækóns rímur*¹⁴

It seems to be the general consensus that *Snækóns rímur* is the later of Steinunn’s two *rímnaflakkar* (poems consisting of more than one *ríma*):

It is difficult to put one’s finger on which *rímur* Steinunn composed first. To be sure, *Hyndlu rímur* seem in all respects to be more unpracticed, and nowhere do they give signs of complexity in meters or rhyme, and that is something she tackles more confidently in *Snækóns rímur*.... This might well indicate that she had been a beginner in the art when she composed *Hyndlu rímur* but on the other hand had obtained some experience when she set out to compose *Snækóns rímur*.¹⁵

Steinunn’s *Snækóns rímur* is a poem in four fitts, 319 stanzas, including fifty stanzas in the four *mansöngvar*,¹⁶ and these latter are for the most part much shorter than the ones in *Hyndlu rímur*. With the exception of two stanzas on death (*Snækóns rímur* 1.43–44) virtually all of the discussion of Steinunn’s *rímur* has concentrated on the *mansöngvar* on the assumption that because these verses are in the first person that they have something to say about the author herself.¹⁷ These introductory verses are all very formal, and most of them are informed by the rhetorical topos *excusatio*, itself traceable back to Cicero and Quintilian.¹⁸ To say disparaging things about their verse is a traditional stance among *rímur*-poets,¹⁹ but when used by Steinunn, the effect of the topos is not to draw attention to the poetry *per se*, but in fact to emphasize the fact that it is a woman who is composing the verses. Beyond this, the persona of the *mansöngvar* does not reveal anything of a specific nature about Steinunn as an individual.

The first fitt or *ríma* of *Snækóns rímur* is in the meter *ferskeytt*²⁰ and

Although I am a little great power and all the praise of the world,

gáveðaðaróhrósam allh,ing when death summons people.
 ekki neitt það megna má,
 þá menn vill dauðinn kalla.

1.44

Deaðir höfðu furteigideátur forþæt, neither for arrogance nor lordly
 fyrir, I think for herkegeson, it best to have all pleasure in
 haldag þóní hófi bezt
 að hafa alla kæti.—

Snær is now victorious and King Geir is buried. The people soon discover that Snær is a good king and generous to his supporters. He is generous too with food and lodging for strangers over the winter, but the guests have to clearly state who and what the king is on the first day of summer. But no one is able to discover anything about the king's circumstances. All who fail to do so lose their lives and have their heads mounted on a wall. On one occasion thirty travelers are shipwrecked on the island and lose everything. The king invites them to be with him over the winter, but they say that all of them except one called Hrafn have already accepted winter lodgings. The king urges Hrafn to accept, and he does. The king provides a ship and sends the other travelers on their way.

1.74

Formerly the foolish ship gripped the “ ‘dregs of the cistern’ [of
 Geymsbó,²¹ handling (and) POETRY] (i.e. wrote bad poetry); the
 scoldion gleeds, I seek the work of a cog “cog of Klóðólfur²³ <dwarf>”
 Klóðólfur denoting words of forgetfulness.

The second *ríma* in the meter *braghenda*²⁴ is sixty-four stanzas, including the sixteen stanzas of the *mansöngur*. It begins with an *excusatio*, this time specifically because the poet is a woman.

2.2

The hvinge²⁵ of the polished horseloff Óðin²⁶]” [MEAD > POEM]
 scarcely pours well to serve those who think little about it; that
 may offend childish opinion.
 þeim, sem lítið þar um þenkja;
 það má bernska hyggju krenkja.

2.3

The ass beglið as it considers the golden in elegant on its merits;

truly I would compose the “toast of Sigtýr (= Óðin)” [POEM] in a complicated fashion if I knew better how.

*sannlega munda ég Sigtýrs minni*²⁷

semja dýrt, ef betur kynni.

2.4

~~Will not show that type of people~~ I will not show that type of people, to the “boards of wealth” [WOMEN], deficient in manly-understanding,

miklu heldur mínum líkum,

mannvits lökum auðar brí kum,

2.5

~~unless a few people~~ unless a few people, for poetic composition to rights, those who stir the “burden of Boðn” [POEM] (i.e. compose the poem) nourish the abilities of the best wisdom.

þeir, sem Boðnar byrði hræra,

beztu gáfur vízku næra.

2.6

~~How is it possible through loss of intelligence~~ How is it possible through loss of intelligence, might blame the measure of the poem, because the exhaustion of my quality of intelligence does not improve their narrative.

því ei bætir þeirra ræða

þrotnun minna hugvits gæða.

Even though people have impoverished eloquence, they claim to know how to criticize poetry, and people expect more from her. But is it not proper to turn attention away from one’s neighbor’s mistakes. The poem should be judged on its quality and not on who the author is, and she concludes by challenging men to stop trivializing women’s poetry.

2.11

~~Those people, who Frost the dwarf~~ Those people, who Frost the dwarf, parents’ of Frosti <dwarf>” [SHIP > POEM] (i.e. compose poetry), are pleased therewith to reprove the “boards of the broach-pins” [WOMEN], to throw heavy words at them.

þorna bríkur þar með lasta,

þungum orðum að þeim kasta.

2.12

Eg þó við ég vændi þá að þetta væri þú, of wealth” [MEN] derisively, even though they sometimes drink to women in the text of their poems.

*dárlega þó til drekki sprundum
í diktun kvæða sinna stundum.*

2.13

Hfóðers sjé að þú heyrir öng [woman’s] doings, it is fitting, even though the best man would have to count the women last.

*maklegt er, þó maðurinn bezti
mætti reikna fljóða lesti.*²⁹

2.14

Flésmest þú ert sáinnur þeir skinnalposýrion possess honor; I do not care to diminish in words an excellent person with a foolish mind (i.e., the male critic).

*hirði ekki hólða dýra
með heimsku minni í orðum rýra.*

2.15

Þerfnelega söngsamtíðir af þessum fljóðurns from the “hovel of poetry” [MIND]; the happy thane and the “path of rings” [WOMAN], I ask they honor it to the good.

*blíður þegn og bauga tróða
bið ég virði það til góða.*

2.16

Wömen þessu þessu at þý þýðum, yet, knows how to listen, may the blessing of God with my prayer reward them on every occasion.

*blessan guðs með beiðni minni,
bætist þeim í hverju sinni.—*

Hrafn is invited to spend the winter with the king and told that on the first day of summer he must say who the king is. The king’s men do not know where he spends the night and they tell Hrafn that he will not come out of this alive. He says that he is not afraid of death and he will obey the king. They return to the king’s hall. On the evening of Yule, Hrafn decides to find out where it is the king spends the night.

2.40

~~Mónaréfið hjá hlyðingshalli þess kinná, sem~~ hringing greatly; its tumult
was clearly heard; the “thundering one of waterfalls” [RIVER]
rushed rapidly on.
hennar hljómur heyrðist gella;
hratt fram dundi fossa hvella.

The king enters the river and Hrafn follows and finds a solid path under his feet. The king is unaware he is being followed. They go under the water to a country there.

2.47

~~Þá þó þá á dýrkúgum ýla blítu,~~ harts and oxen grazed the
flowers, cropped the herbs away from the oaks.
hjörð og uxor blómga bitu,
burt af eikum jurtir slitu.

2.49

~~Nóttin við tilhaginn sténoð þýðir starstun~~ on a street; its
construction on the gilded girdings (i.e. walls) was showy with
locked gates.
hennar verk á gjörðum glæstum
glyslegt var með hliðum læstum.

2.50

~~Mítt állar sínæðir þýðir stýptir~~ with various pictures and precious
jewels mounted on them down to the middle, cast in gold.
adamasteinar í þá greyptir,
ofan að miðju gulli steyptir.

2.51

~~Þá mátti þá fíðlað hál í fleðhaðali~~ with the “pyre of the flood”
[GOLD]; all around, letters with a display of artistry proclaimed in
various languages.
letur í kring með listar þrjáli
lýst með ýmsu tungumáli.³⁰

Old books say that the king of this country is called Hálfván. A great crowd of people come to greet Snær as if he were a woman and it is clear that Snær is indeed now a woman, who says that she can only stay until cock-crow. She goes to meet King Hálfván and they

establish themselves in a hall. Hrafn follows to find out what is going on.

2.64

~~Norðra knörinn berð á landið~~ “~~knör of the dwarf~~” [lýtur, CHANTING OF THE RÍMA]
with a latched door; the childish “*knör* of Norðri <dwarf>”
[POEM] is wrecked, bears to land nothing useful.
Norðra knörinn bernskan brýtur,
berst að landi öngvu nýtur.

The third *ríma* in the meter *úrkast frumhent* (earlier called *skothent*)³¹ is sixty-eight stanzas with a seven-stanza *mansöngur*. In this *mansöngur* Steinunn reminds the audience that composing poetry is sometimes a risky business if the audience does not think that what is being offered is up to their standards even though presented by a poet of some reputation. She hopes that on this occasion they will appreciate her efforts.

3.1

~~Hér að fengur hér þó dæð~~ “~~the making of the horns’ of Hár (= Óðin)~~” [MEAD > POEM] passes from the lips; the “making of the verse” [POEM] does not proceed completely according to plan.
Hárs af vörum,
*ekki gengur óðar smíði*³²
allt að kjörum.

3.2

~~The þingur gengur~~ “~~the response which suits the content, least of all~~”
because the fair “*knör* of Suðri <dwarf>” [POEM] goes out into the sound (i.e. is launched; i.e. the poem begins).
sem efni hagnar
sízt því fagnar Suðra knör
á sundi dragnar.

3.3

~~Margt aðal fittir þar skilnað~~ “~~many of them will be able to do that as the world disproves~~”
af minni tekur;
mun þeim varla vera það tamt,
sem veröldin hrekur.

3.4

~~Þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá
þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá~~ moderation for them to bring low the
practiced eloquence, loss of payment³³ and much of the same if
one wishes to heckle them.

*mælsku tama,
missir fjár ef mann vill hrella
og margt hið sama.*

3.5

~~Þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá
þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá~~ sufficient if I am patient in the world, for
which reason I shall not discuss the matter any more at this time.

*í veröldinni;
því skal ræða þar um ei
að þessu sinni.*

Hrafn watches carefully what goes on. The couple has a son who wishes to take a ring from the woman. She does not appear to notice the child's existence. The king wants to know if she has had any success with her winter guests. She says that she has one who acts differently and who has been staring at her, but that the situation seems hopeless. King Hálfðán reminds her that unless this guest is able to clear up this sorrowful situation, they will never see each other again. It turns out that the king has a herd of oxen looked after by three slaves. One of the oxen is larger than the rest but falls over a cliff and is killed. The cowherds begin to argue, but the queen is not impressed as the sorrows facing her are half as much again as terrible.

3.30

~~Þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá
þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá~~ give shelter to the prized ox; there slaves
had to attend it, three in number.

*veita fölu;
þar um hugsa þrælar áttu
þír að tölu.*

3.31

~~Þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá
þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá~~ the ox pinched down over the cliffs; in this
predicament, all stared open-mouthed up at this disaster....

*ofan af björgum,
í þeim höldum allur gleyptist
upp að vörgum....*

3.33

~~Þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá
þær þeir vilja dæla í mál, en þá er þá mál þá~~ argument and tie themselves up in anger;

they spoke concerning the distress to the woman and demanded a reply.

og reiði vöfðust,
svanna hrelldum sögðu frá
og svara kröfðust.

3.34

~~The woman said that concerning the subject of the calf, happiness is cut short, said this not to be terribly important that the men point out....~~

um kálfsins efni,
kvað þess eigi vera vert,
að virðar nefni....

3.37

~~The labourer said to the woman that he had destroyed the slaves about the work; they hear that; the “wealth-fir” [WOMAN] discussed the disappearance of the ox no more.~~

þeir það heyra;
um uxa hvarfið auðþöll ræddi
ekki meira.—

The time comes for the queen to leave the king. Hrafn follows her back to the world. No one had missed him. The rest of the winter passes and the King Snær becomes more and more downcast. The men talk about matters and urge Hrafn to flee.

3.54

~~The struggle and the help of a difficult issue has much ruined many who with the same danger have served the king.~~

margan tjónað,
sem með vogun samri hafa
sikling þjónað.

3.55

~~Sixteen of all his servants, at his sight oppressed by the “grove of riches” [MAN] (here, the king) all together just like dogs were hanged.~~

so aðþrengdir
átta saman eins og hundar
urðu hengdir.

3.56

~~Man þótti þess gímn allur hessi~~
 Man þótti þess gímn allur hessi; for
 this reason we urge the “flinger of the shaft” [MAN] to flee from
 here.

úr upphafs veðan;
 því vér eggjum fleygir fleins
 að flýja héðan.

Hrafn says that he is not worried. He has survived shipwreck and he has been treated well. He does not intend to betray the king. On the last day of winter, the whole retinue including the king is silent.

3.68

~~Hlyggja þing dæra fóklyttu~~
 Hlyggja þing dæra fóklyttu; poem fades away; it increases the
 effort for me of my wretched effort.

hróður dvín;
 ávinning mér eykur rýran
 iðjan mín.

The final *ríma* is 113 stanzas in *ferskeytt*, including eighteen stanzas of the *mansöngur*. The work of the poet, deficient in intelligence, will soon be concluded, as everything temporal must come to an end. Then as with the *mansöngur* of the fourth *ríma* of *Hyndlu rímur*, these final introductory stanzas move into an elaborate metaphor, one in which one finds echoes in the many “Fuglakvæði” of the seventeenth century,³⁴ and a figure which has drawn the attention of those few who have written on this poem.³⁵ Steinunn introduces the figure of the ptarmigan (female writers) and the swan (male writers) and the relative merits of the song of each group. This time instead of denying that women have any business to be involved in artistic creativity, she makes a claim, within a rhetoric appropriate to her time, for an acknowledgment of the difference between the two voices and yet a claim for an *equal* consideration of both.

4.4

~~Hver þjápnir og dóttir~~
 Hver þjápnir og dóttir hidden in its down each on its own path;
 even though the swan sings better than she does, she does not
 work herself into a state.

hver á sínum vegi;
 þó svanurinn betur syngi en hún,³⁶
 sér til móðs fær eigi.

4.5

~~The one who does not~~ come out of the before-mentioned birds; I think he who has endowed them accepts each equally.

upp af fuglum tjáðum;

þenki ég sá, sem þeim hefur veitt,

þiggi jafnt af báðum.

4.6

~~For him, whose gift has~~ them, they turn in their thoughts to thanks; for the little which has come to me, praise be to him without end.

til þakkar huganum vanda;

fyrir það litla, er lénti mér,

lof sé honum án enda.

4.7

~~So good is our ability~~ with some to compose in rhymed³⁷ speech; which person will care to collect from me the words of the poem?

samhent mál að stefja;

hver mun hirða maður af mér

mærðar orða krefja?

4.8

~~Myrdrednir manni~~ so that the vexation of the world would be forgotten; this is in no way comparable; each is the same for a long time.

so gleymist heimsins ami;

þetta er öngvu lagi líkt;

lengi er hver hinn sami.

Guðrún Helgadóttir comments on these verses:

She [Steinunn] is feminine³⁸ without compromising her principles. She readily agrees that the swan sings better than the ptarmigan and that the same “tune” is not found in both of them. She agrees that men compose poetry better than women, but that both genders each go their own way. This admission does not spring from the conventional politeness of the *rímur*-poets; rather it is Steinunn’s modesty sprung from the recognition of one who knows their limitations and dares to recognize them, and by this device her voice becomes stronger.³⁹

This section of the *mansöngur* shows an awareness of the

marginalization of women's creativity and makes a call for something to be done about it, a position she had articulated earlier in *Snækóngrs rímur* (2.11–15) where she had confronted a masculine distain for women's poetic accomplishments. The existence of stanzas such as these indicates that this was a topic that Steinunn and others of her circle must have discussed and debated (although it would be unlikely to be a topic confined to just her household). And it may very well be that further stanzas on this and similar topics lie buried in the mass of unpublished (and undervalued) material from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Before ending this *mansöngur*, Steinunn turns to the reality of poverty in Iceland and the harsh treatment handed out to those who did not have any kind of economic security. Her only answer (one certainly consistent with her time and class) is to make a case for individual Christian compassion.

4.9

~~Where will find the Icelandic~~
~~Where will find the Icelandic~~ Alter who suffers lacking money? Most
 people oppress a poor person: he would be better off dead.
er hjarir aura snauður?
Vesalan flestir virðar hrjá:
væri hann betur dauður.

4.10

~~Nothing is of Swedish for~~
~~Nothing is of Swedish for~~ from various [sources], but all that will
 pass; many a sorrow strikes the heart in every direction it looks.
allt það líða hlýtur;
hryggðin margföld hjartað slær,
í hverja átt sem lítur.

4.11

~~Faithen goð give me faith~~
~~Faithen goð give me faith~~ or—I make my intention clear—who
 will show compassion to a person placed in the middle of sorrow.
 —*greini ég ætlan mína,*—
sem manni stöddum mitt í hryggð
með aumkvan vill sýna.

Steinunn sees herself as a poet who is in some measure just as oppressed as the poor and, as such, deserving of compassion. But despite their wealth, the powerful often end up in trouble and sorrow (is she perhaps thinking here of Bishop Brynjólfur?). The truth is that the poor can turn the sorrows of the rich to their own advantage. At this point the direction of the poem is not clear, but the poet will have

to choose how it develops.

4.18

~~The faskonfiðmansöngur of the~~ *the mansöngur* passes away; it makes difficult the work of the memory; the right-seeing “oak of the ‘pyre of the Rhine’ ” [GOLD > WOMAN] will attempt the easier way.
*minnis iðju tregar;
réttisýn eikin Rínar báls
ráði til hægra vegar.*⁴⁰

On the first day of summer the whole company sits quiet. The king turns to Hrafn. He says that he saw the king sorrowful in the arms of a man. He saw the noble child to whom no attention was given when it reached out to touch a ring.

4.26

~~Slates were hatched in the oven,~~ *the din* of the conflict increased among them; they quarreled about a dead ox; for this reason you silenced them.
*þrætu jókst þeim kliður;
um dauðan uxa deildu þeir;
dampaðir þú því niður.*

The king is pleased with the answer and gives Hrafn five gold rings, a helmet, and armor. The retinue is not pleased at this. The two then leave the hall and go out to talk. Hrafn asks the king how this situation came about. The prince speaks of a happy childhood, and then using a verb which is usually used by women (*að gifta*) tells of a marriage and the birth of a child. The “I” of the explanatory narrative has now clearly become a woman. She says she became beloved in all of Álfheimur. Her mother dies and her father marries again. She goes to meet her stepmother.⁴¹ Her father is not home but orders his daughter well taken care of. She is still mourning for her mother, but the stepmother appears well disposed to her stepchild. One morning while out walking the two meet and the stepmother who is in a foul temper imposes a terrible *álag*.⁴²

4.64

~~Skalsgrófr towards kiptin with~~ *a change (of situation); you will* have shame and scorn; continually you with the “sun of the forehead” [EYE] look at me in an unfriendly way.
*skömm og smán þú hlýtur;
ennis sólu einatt þú*

óhýrt til mín lítur.

4.65

~~Refarskust uoam rannadig~~, a path of affliction, driven from the married state; people may call you the son of your father, but not the daughter.

rekin af giftu vegi;
son þíns föðurs seggir þig
segi, en dóttur eigi.

4.66

~~Hoggur þú tinná hagnýr~~ your situation will then be worse than before? If you say my design (i.e. the terms of the *álag*) to anyone, death will seek you quickly.

horfi þá verr en áður?
Ef segir þú nokkrum setning minn,
sæki þig dauðinn bráður.

Ólöf, a happily married woman who, in mourning for her mother, has so excited the jealousy of her new stepmother, that the latter places on Ólöf the *álag* for her to become her father's son, and much of the rest of the poem seems intent on exploring the cultural and sexual ambiguities which result from this transformation. This will go on for eight years and unless someone is able to discover Ólöf's real nature by the end of the ninth year:

4.72

~~Birtist nokkurn hlýtt þínn~~ a little before the pleasant gentleness of summer, you will from that time be a savage wolf among animals.

fyrir blíðu sumars hýra,
ólmur vertu upp frá því
úlfur á millum dýra.

At this point her father turns up, sees what is going on and cuts the head off the “flagð” (female monster), his wife. But it is too late to change the terms of the *álag* and the daughter casts off her women's garb (and perhaps her femaleness) and dresses in armor. As Snær she sets out for the human world and, as was narrated in the first *ríma*, kills King Geir for no particular reason. Nine years have now passed, but Hrafn's curiosity has fulfilled the conditions of the *álag* and released her from its conditions.

4.82

~~Ólöf is mytþinginn minn~~, the daughter of King Ingjaldur *fróði* (the wise); he was the equal to bold warriors; eager for good battle.
 Ingjalds dóttir fróða;
 sá var körsfum kempum jafn,
 kænn til vígsins góða.

4.83

~~Hlaðgerður hinfestir sig~~ Lady Hlaðgerður full of the deeds of faithfulness; they had no other child but me alone; happiness was with both of them.
 fullur af tryggða dáðum;
 þaug áttu ei barn nema eina mig;
 auðnan var með báðum.

She gives Hrafn the crown and the title of king, people, property, and a ship full of gold. They return to the hall, and the retainers pledge Hrafn their support. Ólöf is able to go home, but her joy is short lived as her husband, Hálfván dies. After a six-month mourning period, she summons Barður, her late husband's brother, and asks him to foster her son, whom she judges to be too young to rule the kingdom.

4.103

~~Óne~~“ferja⁴² of Óánd (fróðin)” [POEM] out on the waves tacked once before (i.e. the poem earlier changed the setting); it seems to me best the “*knör* of Suðri <dwarf>” [POEM] should land in the same harbor (i.e. switch to that setting).—
 áður fyrri vendi;
 mér sýnist bezt í sömu höfn
 Suðra knörinn lendi.—

4.104

~~Í Hlaðgerð Hrafn hefnir stund~~, while, rather happy with the retinue; often he, the noble “wood of the arrows” [MAN], thought on the generous woman.
 heldur glaður við lýði;
 oft þeinkti á erlegt sprund
 örva viðurinn fríði.

He goes one night to Álfheimur and sees her wounded with sorrow. But when she recognizes him, all that is forgotten. He asks her to

marry him, and they return to Háleygjjar, where they live until old age among their many children.

4.110

~~Í Háleygjjar þær byggðu fárum,~~
Í Háleygjjar þær byggðu fárum; instead; they dwelt there until old
age; they had children with happy faith; they gave out “the icicle
of the hand” [GOLD].
þjuggu þar til elli,
áttu börn með blíðri trú,
býttu greipar svelli.⁴⁴

The poem ends with a rhetorical flourish because Steinunn “binds” her name in runes in the concluding stanzas.⁴⁵

4.111

~~Það ég hefnað sögu sína~~
Það ég hefnað sögu sína; the story that I am now finished composing;
it is time for me to rest the weary spirit; I have become very worn
out.
að semja er ég nú búin;
mál er að hvíla mæðið geð;
mjög er ég vorðin lúin.

4.112

~~Þin traug of tveföld nauð~~
Þin traug of tveföld nauð (= skjóll, “drizzle” = N), in the “unreliable
protection”⁴⁶ (= *stunginn ís* “‘stabbed’ [or ‘fractured’] ice” = M),
the “hindrance to the flowers of the earth” (= *ís* “ice” = I), twofold
need (= *nauð* [twice] = ++), Týr (= T), and Sól (= S) [= STÉINUN] has
distilled the “catch of Ómi < Óðin >” [POEM] (i.e., composed the
poem).
hindrun jarðar blóma,
tveföld nauðinn, Týr og Sól
tært hefur veiði Óma.

4.113

~~Sá minni hefur Sóna klíð~~
Sá minni hefur Sóna klíð; the “place of Són” [POEM] made by the “place of
the poems” [MIND or THOUGHT], may God give them luck and
peace, joy at the time of death.
samið af ljóða grundu,
gefi þeim drottinn gæfu og frið,
gleði á dauða stundu.

Issues of Gender Construction in *Snækóns rímur*

In *Snækóns rímur*, the stepmother, as is consistent with these stories in the folklore tradition,⁴⁷ persecutes her stepdaughter. However, there are significant differences in the reasons for the stepmother's hostility between *Snækóns rímur* and Steinunn's source, *Snjáskvæði*. In the former, the hostility can be said to be weakly motivated, while in the latter it is strongly motivated, and this may have something to do with the differing endings of the two stories. In *Snjáskvæði* the only daughter of the King of Álfheimur is married off to a noble man of the kingdom. Her mother dies and the king marries again. The princess goes to meet her stepmother, and it seems that she has the *álag* placed on her because she is with child and due to give birth to a son. In this case, it seems to me, the stepmother is wary of the possibility that the throne and inheritance might devolve to the daughter's line rather than her own. Therefore she attempts to prevent the daughter and her offspring from being any economic or political threat to herself or her offspring. In *Snækóns rímur*, Ólöf is married and has a child (4.42–44) and is living a happy married life. Her mother dies and she sorrows greatly at her loss (4.47). After some time she learns that her father has married again (4.50) and makes a journey to her father's home to meet his new wife (and her new stepmother). The king is not able to be there when his daughter arrives but commands his retinue to take good care of her. When she arrives she is still in mourning for her mother:

4.58

~~Móðir foranfylakt of gættu,~~
Móðir foranfylakt of gættu, although I offended no person;
the vixen behaved elegantly toward me, although she planned
treachery.

mann þó öngvan styggi;
fagurt við mig foxið⁴⁸ lét,
falsk þó undir byggi.

4.59

~~Leysað með fíflum og þrá~~
Leysað með fíflum og þrá longing of the mind plainly under a
cover of cheerfulness; it was incredibly difficult to outwit the
female monster; so people went to bed.

ljóst með gleðinnar skýlu;
fullillt var við flagði⁴⁹ að sjá;
foru menn so til hvílu.

The two meet in the morning and the stepmother who is in is in a grim temper places a remarkable *álag* on her stepdaughter (4.62–74).

The stated reason for this is that the stepdaughter has been looking at her with unfriendly glances (a variant of the gaze of Signý in *Hyndlu rímur* which revealed the monstrous origin of Hildur, 3.30–35), but the motive seems to be the same as in *Snjáskvæði*. The daughter with her continued mourning for her mother is likely to attract the king's compassion more to the favor of his daughter and his grandson than that of his new wife and her family, actual and potential. This is fertile narrative ground (as Steinunn herself demonstrated in *Hyndlu rímur*), but *Snækóns rímur* has other interests—the king arrives just as the stepmother, who is once again described as a “female monster” or troll-woman, has completed laying her *álag* on Ólöf. His response is to execute his new wife.

4.75

~~The king can perceive the blood~~ was unleashed which the “mare”
had laid upon me; he struck the head off the monster with a
“switch of hilts” [SWORD].
þá hryssan á mig lagði;
hjalta vendi hjó hann með
höfuð í burt af flagði.

The *álag* that is laid on Ólöf is most unusual. She shall be driven out of the marriage state and become her father's son instead of his daughter (4.65). She cannot reveal her situation to anyone on pain of death, nor can she even recognize the existence of her own son. She must become a man in the world of humans. Neither *Snjáskvæði* nor *Snækóns rímur* are precise on the details of how this is carried out. But since the *álag* in similar stories (including *Hyndlu rímur*) involves a physical metamorphosis (that is, the physical corporeality of the human being is subsumed by the external manifestation of the animal *hamur*⁵⁰), it seems incontrovertible that the *álag* placed on Ólöf in order to punish her is that she has to become a man.⁵¹

That Snær is a man, not a woman in disguise, seems quite clear in *Snækóns rímur*. Hrafn follows King Snær at some distance down the gold lined and deserted pathway under the water to Álfheimur (2.43–44). Then follows a description of the region and its buildings already quoted above (2.45–54). The authorial voice intervenes to provide the audience with the information that according to *fornar bækur* (old books) the region is ruled by King Hálfðán (2.55).

2.56

~~The hind of Pólinshafnar þingáðndraguvarf >~~ [SHIP > POEM] will
return where happy people were walking. The king (i.e. Snær)
rejoices at the city's proximity.

sem voru á göngu blíðir bragnir;
borgar návist kóngur fagnar.

Hrafn is still following behind and observing all that is going on while at the same time remaining out of Snær's sight. As far as he can see, Snær is still a man, and a man in a hurry at that, who is able to enter the city without being hindered by the locked gates which had caught Hrafn's attention earlier (2.49).

2.57

~~The nobleman drew by himself up to the appearance of someone~~
in a hurry; he made his way to the locked gate, it is said that he
did not wait there long.

leið hann stefndi að læstu, hliði
lengi er sagt ei þar við biði.

2.58

~~The king tried to force the lock and the door, working of the locks;~~
a great crowd of men and women made the effort to run toward
him.

mikill fjöldi manna og kvenna
móti hönum gjörði að renna.

Once inside the city the king must undergo a metamorphosis back to a woman. For the last time until the return to Háleygjar, Snær is referred to as “he.” The words of the people which so please the prince are that “he” is once again being greeted as “she.”

2.59

~~Soon afterwards they all heard the people~~
warriors covered in the “voice of the giants” [GOLD] greeted him
as a woman.

hann þá allir kvinnu kvöddu
kappar, þaktir jötna röddu.⁵³

But this pleasure is to be short-lived, because this is not “home.” The desire of the king-now-in-the-form-of-a-woman to meet with King Hálfván further confuses the issue. For Hrafn (and the audience) it appears that the King of Álfheimur is married to a queen who is actually a man in disguise. The narrative will leave this matter unresolved until all is revealed to the audience in 4.37–87.

2.60

~~She who~~ ~~lived~~ ~~delight~~ ~~leeds~~ ~~known~~ ~~hidden~~ ~~the~~ ~~lady's~~ fortunes of the people; the “board of rings” [WOMAN] said she would want to return home before cock-crow.

fyrir hanagal hringa þilja
heim kvaðst aftur koma vilja.

2.61

~~Vid~~ ~~the~~ ~~wedding~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~best~~ ~~fiancé~~ ~~and~~ ~~she~~ wanted to see the handsome king; the noble warrior urged on by love went to meet the proud king.⁵⁴

frægða hetjan kærleiks knúða
kom á fund við vísir prúða.

2.62

~~Then~~ ~~the~~ ~~king~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~“cave~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~oaks”~~ [WOMAN] to come with him; the beautiful woman and the “wood of shafts” [MAN] sat themselves down in an excellent hall.

í sal veglegan settust niður
séleg drós og fleina viður.

However, the ambiguity of Snær’s “true” gender will now raise a similar ambiguity with regard to Hrafn’s behavior during the winter. As the opening of the narrative stated, of all the shipwrecked sailors, only Hrafn did not have winter lodgings and the king was most insistent that he stay the winter. We already know that this is an invitation not without its perils. Snær has warned his winter guests that they have to say *glöggst af sjálfum mér* (clearly about me myself, i.e., who I am) on the first day of summer (1.55). No winter guest had ever been able to discover the king’s *hagur* (circumstances) (1.57), and all had lost their lives (1.58). Hrafn allows himself to be persuaded to accept the king’s invitation. Nothing of interest is reported until the day before the yuletide festival when Hrafn becomes curious about the king’s disappearance and follows him. King Hálfðán (with Hrafn watching) asks if the woman has by any chance offered winter lodgings to a wise man. She replies that there is one who stands out as she is aware of him frequently casting glances at her.

3.22

~~Often~~ ~~the~~ ~~king~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~day~~ ~~he~~ ~~terribly~~ ~~swift~~ ~~he~~ ~~stares~~ ~~at~~ ~~me~~; ~~he~~ ~~will~~ ~~not~~ ~~be~~ a man of redress when it becomes spring.

á mig starir;
sá mun eigi sæmdar maður

Snær uses the phrase “starir á mig” (stares at me), but this is easy to interpret as “kasta (or renna) hýra augu til einhvers” (to gaze with “warm” [i.e. affectionate] eyes at someone). This certainly seems to be Snær’s interpretation, for the second half of the stanza would indicate that this winter guest will be no different from the others. This is a further indication that this is a poem in which the category of gender becomes increasingly difficult to sustain. Is Hrafn casting glances at the king as part of his attempt to find out something about him? Or are the glances amorous in origin? They cannot be anything less than ambiguous because when the end of the story is reached it turns out that they have been appropriate after all. Like the old man and the old woman sensing something special in Hyndla’s doggish tears,⁵⁵ Hrafn has been able to look at King Snær and see beyond and through his male shaping to the potential Ólöf underneath. But the audience does not know that this yet. Hrafn by making eyes at King Snær has not compromised his male gender, because it appears as if King Snær is like Flosi Þórðarson in *Njáls saga*, the passive partner of a supernatural creature.⁵⁶ Hrafn can exercise his male sexual aggression on either a man or a woman without compromising his status as a male just so long as he does not allow another male to use him as the penetrated partner. This is made quite clear when on the first day of summer Hrafn is called upon to fulfill his part of the agreement for winter lodgings.

4.21

~~Þu ertu þessíðan hegnislað~~ More, the help of cleverness from him:
 “From what kind of person⁵⁷ have you accepted shelter this winter?”

hilmir krefur betur:

“Af hverjum manni hefur þú það
 hýsing þennan vetur?”

Situated as Hrafn is, in the hall in front of King Snær’s retainers, his response can only be seen as a challenge to the king’s gender and a sexual insult.

4.22

~~Þu ertu þessíðan hegnislað~~ Hesitation of words; he answered the noble monarch: “I saw you lie earlier with immense sorrow in the embrace of another man.”
 anzaði frægum tiggja:

“Með feikna sorg í faðmi manns
fyrir sá ég þig liggja.”

In fact Hrafn had seen the king and queen do no more than embrace when seated in the hall (3.15) and at Snær's departure for the human world (3.41). There had been no opportunity to see them lie together. But Hrafn follows this stanza with a series of details which must have seemed unusually odd to King Snær's retainers: the child ignored by Snær and the quarrel of the slaves over the dead ox (4.23–26). Then Hrafn gives an explanation for Snær's apparent metamorphosis (without committing himself to saying he is a woman become a man or a man become a woman). The king does not exactly have a *hamur*, a shaping, which can be taken on and off, but something rather similar, a garment (in this case a leather cap) of concealment.

4.27

~~Dulfrónud dýpuf þén~~
Dulfrónud dýpuf þén, concealment, sire, is placed on your head,
truly, it seems to me that it cannot be light.
dögling, höfuðsettur,
vissilega, virðist mér,
vera mun ekki léttur.⁵⁸

4.28

~~Nóðfægi sagði þér omeyringar þín~~
Nóðfægi sagði þér omeyringar þín, interpretation concerning your condition;
“user of the ‘pyre of the Thames’ [GOLD > MAN] (i.e. ‘Sire’), I
believe that should be sufficient for the powerful ones (? the
retinue).
mína um þína hagi;
ríkum tærir Temsu báls⁵⁹
trú eg þetta nægi.

King Snær does not comment on Hrafn's speech, but immediately rewards him with gold rings and armor. The king's retinue is not at all pleased at this. They have only understood the sexual innuendoes of Hrafn's explanation and seem to be feeling betrayed by their leader to the point that some appear to want to have a change.

4.32

~~Dulfrónud dýpuf þén~~
Dulfrónud dýpuf þén, he came downcast at the deception
which had gone on for a long time, and because that man should
receive such gifts in the dwelling of the king.
dul sem hafði lengi,

því sá maður grams á garð
gjarfir slíkar fengi.

4.33

~~Steinn hjótt um kirkjusal, the~~
The retinue of warriors scarcely agreed
which noble man they ought to honor more than the other.
saman varla kemur,
hvorn þeir ætti höfðingsmann
að heiðra öðrum fremur.

Hrafn and the king go off for a private discussion leaving the men sitting in the hall. This is now the critical point of the poem. The sexual discourse within which the poem has seemed to have been operating up to this moment has not been one of heteronormativity but one of sodomy. When it comes time for Steinunn to resolve the ambiguity, we are not surprised to discover that the appearance of this discourse of sodomy has all along been an illusion. King Snær is really Ólöf, daughter of the Ingjaldur, king of Álfheimur, put under an *álag* by her stepmother to be a man in the human world (4.38–87).

When the two have finished their discussion, Snær seems to have been physically transformed into Ólöf, as the next reference to her is as *rauna fullur svanni* (the woman full of sorrows, 4.88; cf. *bauga strön* [coast of rings > WOMAN], 4.90). Before disappearing, she chooses Hrafn to take over as king of Háleygjar, and the men agree to accept him. At this point *Snjáskvæði* ends, but *Snækóns rímur* still has a few plot twists left.

The narrative now becomes one of the versions of the theme of the obtaining of a fairy bride,⁶⁰ although there is no example close the form the story takes in *Snækóns rímur*. Ólöf's happiness on being reunited with her husband and child after a nine-year exile will be short, as King Hálfván dies soon after her return. After a tearful six-month period of mourning, she makes her brother-in-law Bárður regent of the kingdom in the name of her son (4.96–102). The story then switches to Hrafn in Háleygjar (4.103). He has not been able to find a suitable bride (no woman is the equal of King Snær?). He then steals back into Álfheimur.

4.106

~~The king þingað þeggnætt, yet~~
The king secretly; he wishes to meet the
“kindling-stick of gold” [WOMAN]; he sees sorrow caused pain to
her, caused her to endure a reddish expression.
gulls vill hitta tróðu;
sér hann henni af sorg var meint,

When Ólöf sees him she forgets all her sorrows and people lead them to the palace. There Hrafn asks for her hand and no one makes any objection. They get married, return to Háleygjar, have children, and live there prosperously until their old age. Nevertheless, while *Snjáskvæði* ended with the sexual discourse of heteronormativity unchallenged with the return of King Snjár to Álfheimur, *Snækóns rímur* returns to reinscribe the discourse of sodomy in its concluding stanzas under the guise of heteronormativity. By marrying Ólöf/Snær at the poem's conclusion, Hrafn validates his attraction to Snær that he had demonstrated during the winter and further validates his charge of Snær behaving as a woman which he made to the king's retinue. The conclusion of the poem then becomes subversive of a patriarchal construction of gender and family despite the author's attempt to contain it within a conventional Christian morality.

In *Snækóns rímur* Steinunn also seems to leave undecided where the focus of the poem should be concentrated, leaving it unclear whether the story is to be that of Hrafn and how he, through his cleverness, moves up the social scale from shipwrecked mariner of indeterminate origins to king of Háleygjar, or whether it is to be the story of Ólöf/Snær and the resolution of the *álög* that forces her into exile from her country, husband, and child. If the *rímur* ended as does *Snjáskvæði* with Ólöf's return to Álfheimur, then one might say that the central character is really Hrafn because in terms of the narrative, Ólöf/Snær is "passive." She really has no control over events, both in her constraint by the *álög* and its consequences and her powerlessness to prevent her husband's death upon her return to Álfheimur. But it is at this point, when she becomes a widow, that she takes charge, arranging a regent for her son and seemingly putting her affairs in order prior to the imminent arrival of Hrafn who comes to claim his fairy bride (there being no woman up to his standards in the human world). Here it seems as if the tale turns into an affirmation of the superiority of "civilization" over the "other." Ólöf does not belong to the civilized human world, and when thrust into it she behaves in a "barbaric" way by executing her winter-guests, generous though she may be with her own retainers. They seem content to acquiesce to the king's generosity and keep quiet even though they do their best to persuade Hrafn to flee and save his life as the first day of summer approaches (3.52–56). Hrafn's calling into question of Snær's gender before the assembled retinue (and recall that at this point, Hrafn himself is unsure of Snær's precise nature) is a further reaffirmation of the "wildness" of Snær. The earlier *sagnakvæði* was content to return Snær to Álfheimur and leave the two regions separate and cautiously

aware and wary of each other. But as Jack Zipes points out:

The entire period from 1480 to 1650 [and considerably later in Iceland] can be seen as a historical transition in which the Catholic Church and the reform movement of Protestantism combined efforts with the support of the rising mercantile and industrial classes to rationalize society and literally to exterminate social deviants who were associated with the devil such as female witches, male werewolves, Jews and gypsies. In particular women were linked to the potentially uncontrollable natural instincts.⁶¹

In Iceland, the social deviants were the male witches, outlaws, *huldufólk*, and those who resisted the moral strictures of the *stóridómur*. Steinunn who was—intellectually if not economically—part of that class in Iceland intent on rationalizing society, chose not to have Hrafn and Ólöf go their separate ways (in the absence of this detail in the surviving *sagnakvæði* there is no reason not to assume that it is Steinunn’s innovation). Rather she brings Ólöf back to the civilized world where she will marry, have children, and become a productive and cultured member of society, at the risk of re-entering into the discourse of sodomy within which much of the poem has seemed to be operating. If Snær, then, is a focal point for the concept of “wildness” (social and sexual) which in this case has also been expressed by the sexual ambiguity that has enveloped the poem, then this is an early Icelandic example of what Foucault calls “the repressive hypothesis,”⁶² a discourse developed and supported by church and state, to privilege heterosexual monogamy at the expense of “peripheral” or “manifold” sexualities. Snær cannot be left to return to Álfheimur to linger there as a potential threat to the stability of human society in the upper world. By having her narrative end with Snær married to Hrafn, producing children, and living “með blíðri trú” (with happy faith, 4.110), Steinunn attempts to signal the victory of an emerging bourgeois ideology as an antidote to the social ills of her time, unaware that she has created a narrative which contains within it a discourse that is potentially and fatally subversive of the very ideology she is intent on sustaining.

APPENDIX I

On Steinunn’s Forebears

Steinunn belonged to several important lineages, but is most directly connected to a family called the *Akraætt* or the *Akra-Finnsætt* who trace their lineage ultimately back to *Laga-Finnur* Pétursson, *lögréttumaður* from Ljárskogar (ca. 1420–after 1504).⁶³ His wife may have been a daughter of Þorsteinn Pálsson and they had at least five

children, among them Arnór (ca. 1450–ca.1515).⁶⁴ He married Elín Jónsdóttir and among their four children was séra Finnur from Akrir in Mýrar (Akra-Finnur) (d. ca. 1534). He had 5 children with his *fylgikona* (companion) Jófríður, among them Steinþór *sýslumaður* in Strandasýsla (ca. 1520–1579).⁶⁵ He married Sesselja Eiríksdóttir í Reykholti and their eldest son was Finnur (1545/50–ca. 1585)⁶⁶ who married Steinunn Jónsdóttir *rebbi* í Búðardal.⁶⁷ Steinunn's mother, Margrét Eiríksdóttir, was the 4th generation from Ólafur *tóni yngri*.⁶⁸

The third son of Finnur and Steinunn was séra Jón á Melum (d.1622) who married Halldóra Einarsdóttir.⁶⁹ Their eldest son was Finnur *eldri*, for a time *spítalahaldari* í Klausturhólum.⁷⁰ His first wife, the mother of Steinunn the poet, was Elísabet, one of the ten children of séra Jón Jónsson *gamli* from Staðahraun (d. 1653)⁷¹ and his second wife, Þórdís Jónsdóttir. Both Jón *gamli* and Jón known as Staðarhrauns-Jón (d. ca. 1660), his son by his first wife, Þóra Högnadóttir, were accomplished poets.⁷² In fact many of the members of this extended family have had a reputation as poets and writers. Among others are: Steinunn's grandfather's brother, séra Sigurður Finnsson Steinþórssonar from Miklaholt (d. 1646); his son, Finnur *lögréttumaður* and *skáld* from Akrir (ca. 1610–1687).⁷³ Sigríður Sigurðardóttir, Finnur's sister, made a second marriage to Gísli Ólafsson from Sauðafell, and their son was Sigurður *lögsagnari* and *Dalaskáld* Gíslason (d. 1688)⁷⁴, who is supposed to have composed at least seven fitts of his version of the *Rímur af Þórði hreðu*, now lost.⁷⁵ His son was Jón *lögsagnari* and *Dalaskáld* Sigurðsson (d. 1722), the author of *Timaríma*.⁷⁶

Steinunn's grandmother, Þórdís Jónsdóttir, was on her mother's side the granddaughter and namesake of Þórdís Eyjólfsdóttir *mókolls yngri* í Haga á Barðaströnd í Vestfjörðum (fl. 1500)⁷⁷ Gíslasonar *sýslumanns* Fillippussonar í Haga,⁷⁸ who with her sister, Kristín, was involved in one of the great family scandals of the first half of the sixteenth century (so scandalous in fact that the chronicles pass over it in silence).⁷⁹ Somewhere in the middle 1530s the two sisters and their brother, Gísli, fled to the protection of Ögmundur Pálsson, bishop of Skálholt,⁸⁰ at that time also acting as *hirðstjóri*, the political representative of the Danish king. Both sisters were pregnant by Gísli. The matter was handled efficiently. Gísli was sent to Norway, where he died later under mysterious circumstances, and both sisters went on to make excellent marriages. Þórdís Eyjólfsdóttir married Halldór Ormsson í Saurbæ.⁸¹ Her sister, Kristín, married séra Gísli Jónsson (ca. 1515–87) in Selárdalur who would later become bishop of Skálholt.⁸² In 1550 Jón *biskup* Arason excommunicated Gísli in part because of his Protestant inclinations and in part because of his marriage to Kristín, and he had to flee the country. However, the year after the

execution of Bishop Jón in 1550, King Christian 3rd sent a letter to Iceland absolving Kristín of any fault in that she had been “*nauðgað til þessa verks*” (forced into this deed).⁸³ Séra Gísli became bishop of Skálholt in 1556.

Other women who found themselves in similar predicaments and who did not have such powerful relatives to protect them were not so lucky, especially after the new law “upholding” moral behavior was enacted in 1564—the so-called *Stóri Dómur*—and they ran the very real risk of being executed by the civil authorities.⁸⁴

But what did this impressive lineage mean in practical terms for Steinunn? Little, if anything. As Kirsten Hastrup has pointed out, by the seventeenth century the “collective representation” of kinship (in other words the “ideology of kinship”) was no longer relevant to the “social experience” of the majority of the people.⁸⁵ To be sure, it was still important for the small clique of large landowners, the upper ranks of the clergy and government officials such as Árni Magnússon, who like many of his class was a genealogical snob, in that he made a note of Steinunn’s immediate ancestors in the genealogy he sketched out on a loose page he inserted into the collection of her poems he had commissioned (AM 146, b, 8vo) and noted there dismissively that Steinunn’s husband was an *almúgamaður* (i.e. he was “common”).⁸⁶ Her lineage may have stood Steinunn in good stead when she came to apply for a servant’s position at Skálholt, and it may also have persuaded Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson to be generous enough to write her a formal letter of recommendation at the end of her service. Furthermore, it may have played a role in accounting for the attention that seems to have been paid to Steinunn’s poetry (nor can her association with Skálholt have hurt). Hers was an extended family in which the poetic gift was supposed to “run,” and Steinunn’s creative efforts confirmed the validity of this belief.

Nor was Steinunn’s father able to capitalize on his or his wife’s lineage. He seemed to have had trouble settling down and accomplishing anything (at least in terms of what was considered important at the time). There is some suggestion that Steinunn may have been born at Skipanes in Melasveit. Steinunn had a sister, Húnbjörg, and at some point Elísabet, Steinunn’s mother, died, and Finnur subsequently married Guðríður, the daughter of Torfi Helgason from Höfn í Melasveit with whom he had two children, Sigríður and Jón.⁸⁷

From 1655 to 1660, Finnur was installed as *hospítalsforstandari* (hospital-superintendent) at Klausturhólar in Grímsnes⁸⁸ and had various dealing with Brynjólfur *biskup* Sveinsson (1605–1675). At this time, when she was around seventeen, Steinunn entered service at Skálholt where she was to spend a number of years (ca. 1657–1662)

during a period when the See was rocked by a number of sexual scandals, not the least being that involving the bishop's daughter, Ragnheiður.⁸⁹ There has survived a letter of reference for Steinunn written on her behalf by Brynjólfur *biskup*. It does not seem to reveal any close personal knowledge of Steinunn on the part of the bishop which suggests that Steinunn may have been a servant attached to the cathedral school rather than the Bishop's household. But as has been noted, the fact that the bishop took the rather unusual step to take time out from his many duties and responsibilities (not the least of which was the scandal surrounding his daughter, Ragnheiður, whose pardon from the king he was in the process of obtaining) to write a reference for this young serving woman, may indeed be as much a reflection of her lineage as well as her personality and behavior (or was it the fact that she had resisted the blandishments of the clergy attendant to the See who seem to have regarded the young women living at Skálholt as theirs to do with what they wished).⁹⁰ By the time she left Skálholt, her father had moved to Laugar in the center of Hrunamannahreppur, and it is likely that Steinunn returned there. At some unknown occasion later, Steinunn married Þorbjörn Eiríksson from Birtingaholt, a farm on the river Stóra-Laxá on the southern border of Hrunamannahreppur. Nothing is known about his family except that his father was probably Eiríkur Guðmundsson from Birtingaholt, but clearly he was not "well-bred" in the sense that Steinunn was. It is not known where the couple spent their married life, but the evidence suggests that Þorbjörn died young. Whatever the case, he and Steinunn had only one child, a daughter, Guðrún (ca. 1672–1726).⁹¹ At some point, probably soon after Guðrún's marriage (probably ca. 1692), Steinunn returned to Melasveit to spend the rest of her life there with Guðrún, her husband Björn, and their children at Höfn.⁹²

APPENDIX II

*Snjáskvæði*⁹³

The poem begins with an eight-stanza *mansöngur* in the *rímur*-meter *gagraljóð* and *gagravilla*.⁹⁴ It seems clear this does not "belong" to "Snjáskvæði," but it is not clear if it has been taken from another *rímnaflökkur*, say an unknown *Snjárs rímur*,⁹⁵ or composed specifically to introduce this particular version of the poem (none of the other *sagnakvæði* or related genres have a *mansöngur*). The *mansöngur* is best described as "generic" and is addressed to a woman, perhaps in a courtly environment. The narrator and the woman only have eyes for each other and burn with passion (stanza four), but the Norns conspire to separate her from him (stanza 5) and prophecy his coming sorrow

(stanza 6). His woman departs and he is left heavy in thought, a situation to be blamed on fortune.

The poem proper now begins. At one time, the poet had a young foster child, the daughter of Þórarinn, who was pleased to listen to the poem, but there is no point here in arguing about the obedience of children, for this is about another woman (stanzas 2–3). In Hátúnabrekkur in Háleygjar ruled an excellent ruler (*óðlingur*) of unknown family. King Snjár was wise in many ways. Many people were invited to his place for winter-lodging, sometimes too many for comfort. But the king rewarded his men well. His castle stood by a wide lake, with splendid walls and shining towers (stanzas 4–6). One day thirty shipwrecked sailors came to Snjár. The ruler (*jöfur*) rode to the shore and invited them all home. They all have winter lodgings elsewhere except for one called Hrafn. The king asks Hrafn home as he wishes to have him in his retinue (stanzas 7–9). Hrafn replies that he is poor, owning only that which he stands in, with nothing good to give the king who says there is no need of his gifts and urges Hrafn to stay with him. He finally agrees and then takes a seat among the retinue (stanzas 10–14). Everyone seems content, but there is a mystery, and that is where the prince sleeps at night. Hrafn is out in the garden and sees the king disappear into the lake. Hrafn follows and finds himself on an even path (stanzas 15–19). He enters the land of Faerie and sees people come to greet the king whom he now sees is a woman, Hildigerður. People have said in books that she was the wife of King Hálfðan, and that she must return to the human world before cock-crow. She is asked what winter-guests she has taken in. There is a handsome man who stares at me, she reports. Her son stands before her and reaches out weeping to play with her rings, and it is as if he is not seen (stanzas 21–25). Two women quarrel over a dead calf which has gone over a cliff. She replies that her sorrow and potential loss are half as great again (stanza 27). Hrafn sees all of this and thinks himself much wiser when he wakes up, but the king is ever more silent as summer approaches, and the retinue tells Hrafn to flee. He says that to do so would be ignoble, that either the king will take his life or give him wealth. The king says he is fond of Hrafn, but people who spend the winter do not survive to the summer. Hrafn is not concerned. As summer nears, the king asks Hrafn if he has ever visited the king's home (stanzas 29–35). Hrafn replies by asking the king if he remembers the two women quarrelling over a dead calf and the son who wished to play with the mother's gold rings. Hrafn then says that he knows about the woman disguised as the king. The king gives him five gold rings, a glorious helmet and other weapons in addition to a ship laden with treasure. Everyone is amazed at these gifts (stanzas 37–40). Hrafn then asks in an aside about Snjár's

situation. She was the only daughter of Logi, the Elven King, and married to a wealthy man in Álfheimur. Her mother died and her father remarried. Snjár went to meet her stepmother one day when her father was away. Her stepmother behaved well towards her, but early one morning imposed the most terrible *álag* on her stepdaughter. She will have a boy-child, but it will die if she acknowledges it in front of people. She must disguise herself or be killed, unless a winter-guest should find out her secret (stanzas 41–48). Her husband threatened her stepmother, but to no avail. Snjár cast off her finery and was enclosed in armor. She made a raid on Háleygjár and killed King Geir. She has now been nine years in this country, and no one has been able to discover her secret. But Hrafn's arrival saved her, because if by the coming summer (at the end of the tenth year since the laying of the *álag*) the truth had not been discovered, then the final fate to befall her would be to become a wolf among wild animals⁹⁶ (stanzas 49–53). But now she can return to her country and son. Hrafn will become the most powerful of kings and take over the kingdom (stanzas 54–55). The poem concludes.

APPENDIX III

The Poetry of Steinunn in Print:

RÍMUR:

Hyndlu rímur (five fitts, Reykjavík, AM 146 b 8vo, 1–17 [= part 1 of the MS]):

Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Rit Rímnafélagsins 3 (Reykjavík, 1950), 1–64.

Snækóns rímur (four fitts, Reykjavík, AM 146 b 8vo, 1–23 [= part 2 of the MS]):

Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island i det 15. og 16. århundrede* (Copenhagen, 1888), 208 (*Ríma* 1, stanza 1 [first line]; *Ríma* 4, stanza 112 only); Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, 65–112.

KAPPAKVÆÐI:

“Kappakvæði” (twenty-one stanzas, Reykjavík, AM 146 b 8vo, 24–31): Pálmi

Pálsson, ed., *Króka-Refs saga og Króka-Refs rímur*, SUGNL 10 (Copenhagen, 1883), xxxvi–xxxvii (stanza 13 only); Jón Þorkelsson, *Digtingen*, 190 (refrain only); Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, 113–32; Jón Samsonarson, ed., *Kvæði og dansleikir*, 2 vols., Íslensk þjóðfræði (Reykjavík, 1964), 2:170 (refrain only).

VIKIVAKAR:

“Andvars knör úr vörum vara” (Reykjavík, AM 146 b, 8vo): *ÍGSVÞ* 3:354 (Refrain only); Jón Samsonarson, *Kvæði og dansleikir*, 2:201 (refrain only).

“Fram vill Dvalins ferjan ana” (five stanzas ([incomplete], Reykjavík, AM 146 b 8vo,

- 37–38): *ÍGSVP* 4:359–60; Jón Samsonarson, *Kvæði og dansleikir*, 2:242 (refrain only).
- “Ólafur kóngur, int var mér” (seven stanzas, Reykjavík, AM 146 b 8vo): *ÍGSVP* 3:208–09.
- “Veittu drottinn góður gæði.” (four stanzas, Reykjavík, AM 146 b 8vo, 35–37): *ÍGSVP* 3:159–62; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Skáldkonur fyrri aldar*, 2: 32–36.
- “Þresti rastar út eg ýti” (five stanzas, Reykjavík, AM 146 b 8vo, 34–35): *ÍGSVP* 3:236–37.
- “Þulins ála hund eg hrindi” (six stanzas, Reykjavík, AM 146 b 8vo, 33–34): *ÍGSVP* 3:235–36; Jón Samsonarson, *Kvæði og dansleikir* 2:190 (refrain only).

LAUSAVÍSUR:

- “Á Borgarfirði báran ýfst” (Reykjavík, AM 146 b, 8vo, 32–33): Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóngs rímur*, xxiv.
- “Við norðanveðri í Höfn er hnítt.” (Reykjavík, AM 146 b, 8vo, 32–33): *ÍGSVP* 3:354 (identified incorrectly as a refrain); *Huld: Safn alþýðlegra fræða íslenskra*, ed. Hannes Þorsteinsson et al., 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Reykjavík, 1935–1936; First ed. 2 vols. in 6 parts, Reykjavík, 1890–1898), 1:68 (1st ed. 1:72); Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóngs rímur*, xxiii; Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson ed., *Lausavísur* (Reykjavík, 1976), 163.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION / MARTIN CHASE

1. *ONP*, s.v. *skáldligr*.
2. *Hallfreðar saga*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, *Stofnun árna Magnússonar á Íslandi*, Rit 15 (Reykjavík, 1977), 44.
3. *Ibid.*, 36.
4. P. E. Müller, “Om Authentien af Snorres Edda, og Beviset derfra kan hentes for Asalærens Ægthed,” *Det Skandinaviske Litteraturselskabs Skrifter* 8 (1812): 1–97, at 30, 72–74, 77–78, and *passim*.
5. Theodor Wisén, ed., *Carmina Norrœna: Ex Reliquiis Vetustioris Norrœnæ Poësis Selecta, Recognita, Commentariis et Glossario Instructa*, 2 vols. (Lund, 1886).
6. Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, eds., *Corpus Poeticum Boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue from the Earliest Times to the Thirteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1883).
7. Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica* 42 (Ithaca, NY, 1978).
8. Finnur Jónsson, ed. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* [Skj], 4 vols., vols. AI, AII, Tekst efter håndskrifterne; Vols. BI, BII, Rettet tekst (Copenhagen, 1912–1915).
9. Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, eds., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, 2 vols., I: Text, Germanische Bibliothek, 4th series: texts, 5th ed. (Heidelberg, 1983).
10. Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch, eds., *Eddica Minora: Dichtungen Eddischer Art aus den Fornaldarsögur und anderen Prosawerken* (Dortmund, 1903).
11. Terry Gunnell, “Eddic Poetry,” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Malden, Mass, 2005), 82–100, at 82.
12. *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (New York, 1993), 149–52.
13. Ursula Dronke, ed. and trans., *The Poetic Edda 2: Mythological Poems* (Oxford, 1997), 162–238.
14. Ursula Dronke, ed. and trans., *The Poetic Edda 3: Mythological Poems II* (Oxford, 2011), 139–52.
15. Dronke, ed. and trans., *Poetic Edda* 2, 154–58.
16. Carolyne Larrington, trans., *The Poetic Edda*, Oxford World Classics (Oxford, 1996), xi.
17. Andy Orchard, trans., *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore* (London, 2011).
18. Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Simone Horst, and Katja Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 8 vols. (Heidelberg, 1993–2012). See “Das Konzept” at <http://www.skandinavistik.unifrankfurt.de/edda/zwecke/konzept/index.html>.
19. Jón Helgason, *Norges og Islands Digtning*, in *Litteratur-Historie, B: Norge og Island*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, *Nordisk Kultur* 8 B (Stockholm, 1953), 4 (my translation).
20. Anne Holtsmark. “Eddadiktning,” in *KLNM*, 3:480–88.
21. Joseph Harris, “Eddic Poetry,” in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica* 45 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985; repr., with new preface, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, Toronto, 2005), 68–

156, at 68.

22. *Ibid.*, 68–69.

23. Gunnell, “Eddic Poetry,” 82.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Larrington, trans., *The Poetic Edda*, x.

26. Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge, 2005).

27. Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*, 7.

28. *Ibid.*, 14.

29. Roberta Frank, “Skaldic Poetry,” in Clover and Lindow, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, 160.

30. *Íslensk Bókmennta Saga 1*, ed. Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson, and Vésteinn Ólason; *Íslensk Bókmennta Saga 2*, ed. Böðvar Guðmundsson, Sverrir Tómasson, Torfi H. Tulinius, and Vésteinn Ólason, 2nd ed. (Reykjavík, 2006).

31. Eddukvæði fjalla um efni úr lífi goðanna eða segja frá löngu liðnum hetjum á forsögulegum tíma, en stundum leggja þau mönnum lífsreglur; dróttkvæðin eru oftast kveðin til að lofa einhvern sem enn lifir eða er nýlega látinn, ellegar þar er minnst atburða sem nýlega hafa gerst. Eddukvæði eru kveðin undir einföldum bragarháltum og skáldskaparmál þeirra er ekki fjarska torskilið; dróttkvæði eru oftast kveðin undir öðrum, miklu erfiðari og flóknari bragarháltum, og þar ernotað skáldskaparmál sem verður að læra með sérstakri ástundun ef þau eiga að verða skiljanleg. Eddukvæðin eru ekki bundin nafni tiltekinna skálda, en mikill hluti dróttkvæða er eignaður nafngreindum skáldum (*Íslensk Bókmennta Saga 1*, 53, cf. Jón Helgason, *Norges og Íslands Digtning*, 5).

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Íslensk Bókmennta Saga 1*, 483–513.

34. *Íslensk Bókmennta Saga 2*, 285–378.

35. Katrina Attwood, “Christian Poetry,” in McTurk, *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, 43–63.

36. Shaun Hughes, “Late Secular Poetry,” in McTurk, *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, 205–22.

37. Terry Gunnell, “Eddic Poetry,” in McTurk, *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, 82–100.

38. Diana Whaley, “Skaldic Poetry,” in McTurk, *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, 479–502.

39. Finnur Jónsson, ed. *Skj*. These guidelines were recently reaffirmed by Bjarne Fidjestøl in his entry on “Skaldic Verse” in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (New York, 1993), 592–4.

40. Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*, 6.

41. Diana Whaley et al., eds., *Poetry from the King’s Sagas 1*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2012), 1:xv–xvi.

42. *Ibid.*, xvi.

43. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in April, May, and June, 1861* (London, 1861), 179.

44. The *Skáldskaparmál* of the *Snorra Edda*. See Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London, 1998).

45. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 180–81.

46. In an extreme example, Annette Lassen has recently argued that the eddic poem *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* dates from the second half of the seventeenth century. See Lassen, ed. *Hrafnagaldur Óðins (Forspjallasljóð)*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 20 (London, 2011), 9–26.

47. *Íslensk Orðabók: Grundvallarrit um íslenska tungu*, 4th ed., ed. Möður Árnason (Reykjavík, 2007), s.v. “miðaldir” (my translation).

48. See e.g. Michael Schulte, "Phonological developments from Old Nordic to Early Modern Nordic I: West Scandinavian," in Oskar Bandle et al., eds., *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*, Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 22 (Berlin, 2002), 2:1081–96; *Íslensk Orðabók: Grundvallarrit um íslenska tungu*, s.v. "miðíslenska."
49. See especially Finnur Jónsson, *Den Islandske Grammatiks Historie til o. 1800*, Ket Kgl. danske Videnskabernes Selskab, Historisk-filologiske Meddelelser 19.4 (Copenhagen, 1933); Jón Helgason, *Málið á Nýja Testamenti Odds Gottskálkssonar*, Hið Íslenska Fræðafjelag í Kaupmannahöfn, Safn Fræðafelagsins 7, (Copenhagen, 1929, repr. Málvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, Rit um íslenska málfræði 4, Reykjavík, 1999); Oskar Bandle, *Die Sprache der Guðbrandsbiblíá*, BA 17 (Copenhagen, 1956).
50. Russell Poole, introduction to *Merlínusspá*, in *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 8 (Turnhout, forthcoming).
51. Ibid.
52. J. S. Eysteinnsson, "The Relationship of *Merlínusspá* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*," *SBVS* 14 (1953–57): 95–112.
53. Poole, Introduction to *Merlínusspá*.
54. John S. P. Tatlock, trans., *The Complete Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York, 1912).
55. Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane, eds., *Strengleikar: An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-one Old French Lais*, Kjeldeskriftfondet, Norrøne tekster, nr. 3 (Oslo, 1979), xxv–xxvi.
56. Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century* (Toronto, 2001).
57. Jan de Vries, *De skaldenkenning met mythologischen inhoud*, Nederlandsche bijdragen op het gebied van germaansche philologie en linguistiek 4 (Haarlem, 1934).
58. Hans Kuhn, "Das nordgermanische Heidentum in den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten," *ZDA* 79 (1942): 133–66.
59. Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, Universitetet i Bergen, Nordisk institutts skriftserie 11 (Øvre Ervik, 1982).
60. *Skj BI*: 449–51.
61. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:114–15.
62. Ibid.
63. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London, 2007).
64. Magnus Olsen, ed., *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, SUGNL 36 (Copenhagen, 1936–38).
65. *Heiðreks saga*, ed. Jón Helgason, SUGNL 48 (Copenhagen, 1924).
66. Vésteinn Ólason, ed., *Sagnadansar*, Íslensk rit 5 (Reykjavík, 1979), 278–9.
67. Jón Helgason, ed. *Íslensk Fornkvæði: Islandske Folkeviser*, 8 vols., EA, Series B, 10–17 (Copenhagen, 1962–81), nr. 23 (1:137–43; 3:198–201; 4:121, 221–26; 5:22–25, 190, 205; 7:208).
68. Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Rit Rímnafélagsins 3 (Reykjavík, 1950).
69. Margaret Clunies Ross et al., eds., *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, (Turnhout, 2007–).

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1. Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*. 2 vols., Grundriss der germanischen Philologie 15–16, rev. ed. (Berlin, 1964–67), 2:246. Cf. Katrín Axelsdóttir, “Gunnlaugur Leifsson og Ambrósíus saga,” *Skírnir* 179 (2005): 337–49.

2. Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford, 1953), 135; for somewhat earlier suggested datings see Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 6 (Cambridge, Mass, 1921), 138; Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, “*Merlínusspá* og *Völuspá* í sögulegu samhengi,” *Skírnir* 173 (1999): 377–419, at 391.

3. As numbered in Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Historia regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth 2, The First Variant Version: A Critical Edition*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge, 1988).

4. Rupert Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England*, Columbia University Studies in English, vol. 2, no. 13 (New York, 1911), 13.

5. For this title see Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An edition and translation of De gestis Britonum [Historia regum Britanniae]* ed. Michael D. Reeve and Neil Wright (Woodbridge, 2007), lix. (Hereafter, *DGB*.)

6. Nikolai Tolstoy, “Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Merlin legend,” *Arthurian Literature* 25 (2008):1–42, at 3–4. Cf. Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.550–c.1307* (London, 1974), 201; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Historia regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth 1, Base Text: A Single-Manuscript Edition from Bern, Burgerbibliothek MS. 56g* ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge, 1984), ix–xvi; *DGB* vii.

7. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Historia regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth, with Contributions to the Study of its Place in Early British History ...* ed. Acton Griscom (London, 1929).

8. Edmond Faral, ed., *La Légende Arthurienne: Études et Documents*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1929).

9. *DGB*, 142–59. The page and line numbers of this edition are used in the ensuing discussion.

10. J. S. Eysteinnsson, “The Relationship of *Merlínusspá* and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia*,” *SBVS* 14 (1953–57): 95–112.

11. David M. Smith, “Alexander [called Alexander the Magnificent] (d. 1148), bishop of Lincoln,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* (Oxford, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/324?docPos=2>.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Diana E. Greenway, “Archdeacons: without territorial title,” *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1066–1300*, vol. 4 (Salisbury, 1991), 23–25: <http://british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=34224>.

14. Smith, “Alexander.”

15. *DGB*, 143–45.

16. *Ibid.*, 142–44.

17. Tolstoy, “Geoffrey and the Merlin Legend,” 11.

18. Raymonde Foreville, “La diffusion du culte de Thomas Becket dans la France de l’Ouest avant la fin du XII^e siècle,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 19 (1976): 347–69, at 347.

19. See Julia C. Crick, *The Historia regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth III: A Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts* (Cambridge, 1989), 331 for this text.

20. Jacob Hammer, “A Commentary on the *Prophetia Merlini* (Geoffrey of

Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Book VII),” *Speculum* 15 (1940): 409–31, at 411.

21. My translation.

22. Leach, *Angevin Britain*, 138–39; Russell Poole, “Conspicuous Mediality in a Medieval Poem: the case of *Merlínússþá*,” in *Medieval Mediality*, ed. Jürg Glauser, Series Medienwandel—Medienwechsel—Medienwissen (Zurich, forthcoming).

23. Helgi Þorláksson, “Historical Background: Iceland 870–1400,” *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Malden, Mass, 2005, rev. ed., 2007), 136–54, at 146; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, ed., *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (Oxford, 1987), xii–xiv.

24. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature*, 199.

25. Margaret Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*, Preface by Peter Foote, Subsidia Hagiographica 78 (Brussels, 1994), 47.

26. Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland*, 245.

27. *Ibid.*, 157.

28. *Ibid.*, 76.

29. *Ibid.*, 77.

30. *Ibid.*, 19, 22, 76–77.

31. Marlene Ciklamini, “Sainthood in the Making: The Arduous Path of Guðmundr the Good, Iceland’s Uncanonized Saint,” *alv* 11 (2004): 55–74, at 70.

32. Katrín Axelsdóttir, “Gunnlaugur Leifsson og Ambrósíus saga,” 349.

33. Poole, “Conspicuous Mediality.”

34. Eysteinnsson, “The Relationship of *Merlínússþá*.”

35. Stephanie Würth, *Der “Antikenroman” in der isländischen Literatur des Mittelalters. Eine Untersuchung zur Übersetzung und Rezeption lateinischer Literatur im Norden*. Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 26 (Basel, 1998), 56.

36. Fredrik Paasche, Anne Holtsmark, and Francis Bull, *Norges og Islands litteratur inntil utgangen av middelalderen*, Norsk litteraturhistorie 1 (Oslo, 1957), 323.

37. Eysteinnsson, “The Relationship of *Merlínússþá*.”

38. Würth, *Der “Antikenroman”*, 82.

39. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature*, 202.

40. “Trójumanna saga ok *Breta sögur*, efter Hauksbók, med dansk Oversættelse,” ed. Jón Sigurðsson, *ÁNOH*, 1848: 3–215; 1849: 3–145, at 1849, 47 (hereafter *Bret*); *Skj* AII: 25, BII:28–29. Enumeration of Parts and stanzas of this poem is as adopted for my projected edition in *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 8 (Turnhout, 2007); translations are mine.

41. *DGB*, 208–15.

42. Eysteinnsson, “The Relationship of *Merlínússþá*,” 99.

43. *DGB*, 145.39–40; cf. *The Historia regum Britannie: The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 102, prophecy 2.

44. *DGB*, 144.

45. *Ibid.*, 198–209.

46. I 25: *Bret* II, 47; *Skj* AII:25, *Skj* BII:29.

47. *DGB*, 145.41; cf. *The Historia regum Britannie: The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 102, prophecy 2.

48. *DGB*, 144.

49. Eysteinnsson, “The Relationship of *Merlínússþá*,” 99.

50. I 26: *Bret* II, 47; *Skj* AII:25, *Skj* BII:29.

51. *DGB*, 145.42; cf. *The Historia regum Britannie: The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 102, prophecy 2.

52. *DGB*, 144.

53. Eysteinnsson, “The Relationship of *Merlínússþá*,” 99.

54. *Ibid.*, 100; for the relevant passage see DGB, 254–55.
55. I 28, lines 1–4: *Bret* II, 48; *Skj* AII:25, *Skj* BII:29.
56. DGB, 145.43–44; cf. *The Historia regum Britannie: The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 102, prophecy 3.
57. DGB, 144.
58. I 29, lines 5–10: *Bret* II, 48; *Skj* AII:25–26, *Skj* BII:29–30.
59. DGB, 145.45–46; cf. *The Historia regum Britannie: The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 102, prophecy 3.
60. DGB, 144.
61. Cf. DGB, 258–59; Eysteinnsson, “The Relationship of *Merlínússþá*,” 100.
62. Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* I 23–26 (Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors [Oxford, 1969]).
63. *Historia Anglorum* III: Henry of Huntingdon. *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. Diana E. Greenway (Oxford, 1996).
64. I 39: *Bret* II, 52; *Skj* AII:27, *Skj* BII:32.
65. DGB, 147.63; cf. *The Historia regum Britannie: Base Text*, ed. Wright, 75, prophecy 6.
66. DGB, 146.
67. Cf. *The Historia regum Britannie: The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 103.
68. Eysteinnsson, “The Relationship of *Merlínússþá*,” 102.
69. Tolstoy, “Geoffrey and the Merlin Legend,” 1.
70. *Ibid.*, 3.
71. Dorothy M. Owen, “Chesney, Robert de (d. 1166), bishop of Lincoln,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5232>.
72. Julia C. Crick, *The Historia regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth IV: Dissemination and reception in the later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1991), 5.
73. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Life of Merlin: Vita Merlini*, ed. Basil Clarke (Cardiff, 1973), 52–53, lines 2–6, with modifications to the translation. The phrase “dux et preceptor” is, as Clarke’s translation “foremost teacher” implies, a hendiadys—but the connotations of the word *dux* for other kinds of leadership when used in reference to a twelfth-century bishop were probably active as well.
74. Tolstoy, “Geoffrey and the Merlin Legend,” 39.
75. *Ibid.*, 34.
76. Crick, *The Historia regum Britannie: Dissemination and reception*, 50.
77. *Life of Merlin*, ed. Clarke, 52–53, lines 19–22, with modifications to text and translation.
78. II 4: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 15; *Skj* AII:11, *Skj* BII:11: here *bók* is my emendation from ms. *borg* (refreshed).
79. I 9: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 41–42; *Skj* AII:23, *Skj* BII:25–26.
80. Eysteinnsson, “The Relationship of *Merlínússþá*,” 96–97.
81. I 10: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 42; *Skj* AII:23, *Skj* BII:26.
82. II 62, line 3: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 37; *Skj* AII:20–21, *Skj* BII:22–23.
83. Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*, Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde 1. (Bonn, 1921; repr., Hildesheim, 1984), 394.
84. Meissner, *Die Kenningar*, 395.
85. *Historia Anglorum* VII 40, ed. Greenway, 484–85.
86. Smith, “Alexander.” Frank Barlow, “Corbeil, William de (d. 1136),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6284?docPos=1>.
87. DGB, 147.79–81; cf. *The Historia regum Britannie: The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 104, prophecy 11.

88. DGB, 146.
89. I 51: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 56; *Skj* AII:29, *Skj* BII:34.
90. I 49: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 55; *Skj* AII:29, *Skj* BII:34.
91. DGB, 147.76–78; *The Historia regum Britannie. The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 104, prophecy 10.
92. DGB, 146.
93. Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* VII 21, ed. Greenway, 446–47.
94. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, II 275 and cf. IV 333 (William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, vol. 1, Text and Translation, ed. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom; vol. 2, General Introduction and Commentary, ed. R.M. Thomson, Oxford Medieval Texts [Oxford, 1998–99], 1:504–5 and 574–75).
95. DGB, 147.76–78; cf. *The Historia regum Britannie: The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 104, prophecy 10.
96. DGB, 146.
97. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* IV 389, ed. Mynors et al., I: 706–7.
98. Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* VII 25, ed. Greenway, 452–55.
99. I 52: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 56–57; *Skj* AII:29, *Skj* BII:34.
100. DGB, 146–47; cf. *The Historia regum Britannie. The First Variant Version*, ed. Wright, 104, prophecy 11.
101. DGB, 146.
102. Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* VII 31, ed. Greenway, 466–67.
103. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* IV: ed. Mynors et al., I: 758–61.
104. I 2: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 39; *Skj* AII:22, *Skj* BII:24.
105. I 4: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 40; *Skj* AII:22, *Skj* BII:24–25.
106. Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* I 15, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 50–51.
107. Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* II 1, ed. Greenway, 80–81.
108. I 5: *Bret* 1848–49, II, 40; *Skj* AII:22, *Skj* BII:25. In line 8 *jarðar* “of the territory” represents an emendation from ms. *jaðar* (where the ink was refreshed in the seventeenth century). The genitive *jarðar* is to be construed as partitive, qualifying *eystra*.
109. DGB, 127.299–300.
110. *Ibid.*, 126.
111. *Ibid.*, 137.494–95.
112. *Ibid.*, 136.
113. Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* I 15, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 50–51.
114. Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* II 1, ed. Greenway, 78–79.
115. Mia Münster-Swendsen, “The Model of Scholastic Mastery in Northern Europe c. 970–1200,” in *Teaching and Learning in Northern Europe 1000–1200*, ed. Jay Rubenstein and Sally N. Vaughn (Turnhout, 2006), 318–56.
116. Michael H. Gelting, “The Kingdom of Denmark,” *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy, Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus’ c. 900–1200*, ed. Nora Berend (Cambridge, 2007), 73–120, at 106.
117. Crick, *The Historia regum Britannie: Dissemination and reception*, 85–86.
118. Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England*, 87–88; Crick, *The Historia regum Britannie: Dissemination and reception*, 85–87.
119. DGB, xxx.
120. Jan Ziolkowski, “The Nature of Prophecy in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*,” in *Poetry and Prophecy: the Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, ed. James L. Kugel (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), 151–62, at 159. The book is extant in an early print, entitled *Prophetia Anglicana, Merlini Ambrosii Britannii ... vaticinia et praedictiones: a*

Galfredo Monumetensi latine conversa: una cum septem libris explanationum in eandem prophetiam ... Alani de Insulis ... (Frankfurt, 1603). Cf. Hammer, "A Commentary on the *Prophetia Merlini*," at 21. For the attribution to Alain de Lille / Alanus de Insulis see Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England*, 88; Crick, *The Historia regum Britannie: A Summary Catalogue*, 320. For the main rival attribution, to Alan of Tewkesbury, see Hammer, "A Commentary on the *Prophetia Merlini*," 3 n. 4; but note the absence of mention of this commentary in A. J. Duggan, "Tewkesbury, Alan of (b. before 1150, d. 1202)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/269>, accessed 20 Oct 2011.

121. Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England*, 88.

THE GENESIS OF *STRENGLEIKAR*: SCRIBES, TRANSLATORS, AND PLACE OF ORIGIN /
INGVIL BRÜGGER BUDAL

1. See Ingvil Brügger Budal, *Strengleikar og Lais: Høviske noveller i omsetjing frå gammalfransk til gammalnorsk*, 2 vols. (Bergen, 2009), 49–76, <http://hdl.handle.net/1956/3477>.

2. For an overview of the manuscript traditions, see Budal, *Strengleikar og Lais*, 49–76.

3. Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane, eds., *Strengleikar. An Old Norse Translation of Twenty-one Old French Lais*, Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-Institutt, Norrøne tekster, nr. 3 (Oslo, 1979), 4 (my translation).

4. Anne Holtsmark, "Anmeldelse av E.F. Halvorsen: The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland," *MM* 1959: 161–170.

5. Olivier Collet, "Du 'manuscrit de jongleur' au 'recueil aristocratique': réflexions sur les premières anthologies françaises," *Le Moyen Âge* 3–4 (2007): 481–99.

6. For an overview and examples, see e.g. Sverre Bagge, "Nordic Students at Foreign Universities until 1660," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 9 (1984): 1–29.

7. *Strengleikar*, ed. Cook and Tveitane, xxv–xxvi.

8. *Ibid.*, xxv–xxvi.

9. Shrewsbury School, MS VII, fol. 200.

10. Georgine E. Brereton, "A Thirteenth-Century List of French Lays and Other Narrative Poems," *MLR* 45 (1950): 40.

11. Hilding Kjellmann, ed., *Denis Piramus, La Vie Seint Edmund Le Rei: Poème anglo-normand du 12 siècle*, Göteborgs Kungliga Vetenskaps- och Vitterhets-Samhälles Handlingar, 5. följd, ser. A, 4:3 (Göteborg, 1935), 4–5.

12. Clia Marie Doty Goodwin, "Old Norse and Middle English Versions of the Lais of Marie de France and the Translation studii," PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1988 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms), 7.

13. DN 19, no. 118, 119, 120, 121, 132, and 133.

14. DN 1, no. 9.

15. DN 19, no. 137.

16. DN 19, no. 153, 155, 156, and 165.

17. DN 19, no. 148 and 172.

18. DN 19, no. 159.

19. DN 19, no. 176.

20. DN 19, no. 177 and 178.

21. DN 19, no. 172 and 175.

22. DN 19, no. 191

23. DN 19, no. 195 and 197.

24. DN 19, no. 211.

25. DN 19, no. 215.

26. DN 19, no. 222.

27. DN 19, no. 230 and 231.

28. DN 19, no. 249.
29. For the detailed analysis of the material, see Budal, *Strengleikar og Lais*.
30. *Strengleikar*, ed. Cook and Tveitane, 63 n. 5.
31. Knut Togeby, "L'influence de la littérature française sur les littératures scandinaves au moyen âge," in *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, vol. 1, *Généralités*, ed. Hans U. Gumbrecht et al. (Heidelberg, 1972), 345.
32. Mattias Tveitane, *Om språkform og forelegg i Strengleikar*, Årbok for Universitetet i Bergen, Humanistisk serie, 1972: 3 (Bergen, 1973), 49.
33. For a reading, edition and description, see "Gvímars saga," ed. Marianne Kalinke, *Opuscula* 7, BA 34 (Copenhagen, 1979), 106–139.
34. R. Keyser and C.R. Unger, eds., *Strengleikar eða Lioðabók: en Samling af romantiske Fortællinger efter bretoniske Folkesange (Lais): oversat fra fransk paa norsk ved Midten af trettende Aarhundrede efter Foranstaltning af Kong Haakon Haakonsøn* (Oslo, 1850).
35. Rudolf Meissner, *Die Strengleikar: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der altnordischen Prosaliteratur* (Halle a. Saale, 1902).
36. Tveitane, *Om språkform og forelegg i Strengleikar*.
37. *Strengleikar*, ed. Cook and Tveitane.
38. "Gvímars saga," ed. Kalinke.
39. See Jean Rychner, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, Les Classiques français du Moyen âge 93 (Paris, 1983), xx–xxi; and Prudence Marie O'Hara Tobin, *Les lais anonymes des XIIe et XIIIe siècles: édition critique de quelques lais Bretons*, Publications romanes et françaises 143 (Genève, 1976), passim.

EINARR SKÚLASON, SNORRI STURLUSON, AND THE POST-PAGAN MYTHOLOGICAL KENNING / CHRISTOPHER ABRAM

1. Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century* (Toronto, 2001), 23.
2. The fullest version of Hallfreðr's conversion story is found in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, the standard edition of which is *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, 3 vols., EA, Series A, 1–3 (Copenhagen, 1958–2000). Hallfreðr's biography is spread out discontinuously in volumes 1 and 2 of Ólafur's edition.
3. See Russell Poole, "The 'Conversion Verses' of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld," *MM* 2002, 15–37; Diana Whaley, "The 'Conversion Verses' in *Hallfreðar Saga*: Authentic Voice of a Reluctant Christian?," in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, The Viking Collection 14 (Odense, 2003), 234–57; Erin Michelle Goeres, "The Many Conversions of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 7 (2011): 45–62.
4. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 1:387.
5. According to *Skáldatal*, Óláfr helgi employed ten poets: fewer than Kings Haraldr Sigurðsson and Sverrir, as many as Earl Skúli, but more than any other Norwegian monarch.
6. Sigvatr's biography is reconstructed from various redactions of *Óláfs saga helga*. See Russell Poole, "Sigvatr Þórðarson," in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano, Kirsten Wolf, Paul Acker, and Donald K. Fry (New York, 1993), 580–1. The "fish-inspiration-episode" is found in *Flateyjarbók: En samling af norske kongesagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, ed. Guðbrand Vigfusson and C. R. Unger, 3 vols., Det norske historiske kildekræftfonds skrifter 14 (Oslo, 1860–8), 3:237–48.
7. Jan de Vries, *De skaldenkenningen met mythologischen inhoud*, Nederlandsche bijdragen op het gebied van germaansche philologie en linguistiek 4 (Haarlem, 1934).

8. This graph is based upon a re-presentation of de Vries's data in Bjarne Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen, BA 41 (Copenhagen, 1999), 279.

9. De Vries, *De skaldenkenningen met mythologischen inhoud*, 84.

10. Initially in Kuhn's review of de Vries's monograph in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 59 (1938): 1493–96, subsequently (and in great detail and with great vehemence) in “Das nordgermanische Heidentum in den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten,” *ZDA* 79 (1942): 133–66.

11. Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry*, 270–93.

12. *Ibid.*, 292–3.

13. *Ibid.*, 293.

14. This task, which would make an interesting Ph.D. topic for someone with statistical as well as skaldic interests, will be made easier once the new edition of the corpus, the series *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2007—) is complete. Another limitation of de Vries's work (uncorrected by Fidjestøl) is its reliance upon Finnur Jónsson's texts, as well as his datings, in *Skj*.

15. Einarr Skúlason, *Einarr Skúlason's Geisli: A Critical Edition*, ed. Martin Chase, Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series 1 (Toronto, 2005), 9. Chase provides the biography of Einarr that I draw upon in this paragraph (pp. 8–10).

16. *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson and Jón Þorkelsson (Copenhagen, 1857), 1:186.

17. Einarr Skúlason, *Geisli*, ed. Chase, 9.

18. Katrina Attwood, “Intertextual aspects of the Twelfth-Century Christian *Drápur*,” *SBVS* 24 (1996): 221–39; Vermund Skard, “Harmsól, Plácitúsdrápa og Leiðarvísan,” *ANF* 69 (1953): 97–108.

19. On *Geisli*'s sources and analogues, see Einarr Skúlason, *Geisli*, ed. Chase, 10–16.

20. The extent of Einarr's oeuvre is determined by its presentation in the online database of the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* project: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?id=39&if=default&table=skalds&val=&view=>. Many of Einarr's works have already appeared in the project's printed editions: *Geisli*, ed. Martin Chase, in *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 7, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2007), 1:5–65; with the exception of *Øxarflokkr* and some of the *lausavísur* and fragments, the rest of Einarr's poetry is edited by Kari Ellen Gade, in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 2, ed. Gade, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 2, 2 vols., (Turnhout, 2009), 2:538–74.

21. Russell Poole, “Metre and Metrics,” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Malden, Mass, 2005; rev. ed., 2007), 265–84, at 274.

22. Verses 145–9, 183, 193–4, 244–5 in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London, 1998), vol. 1.

23. The stanza-numbering reflects the form of the poem given in the skaldic project's database at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?id=1149&if=default&table=text&val=&view=>. The readings are those of *Skj* BI:449–51, which I have checked against the text of *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes.

24. Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1957), s.v. “hnoss.”

25. Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry*, 288.

26. Jan de Vries, “Kenningen und Christentum,” *ZDA* 87 (1956): 125–31, at 129–30; Hans Kuhn, “Das nordgermanische Heidentum in den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten,” 148.

27. Gautr is one of Óðinn's more common cognomens, whereas Váfuðr is found

but once, in stanza 54 of *Grímnismál*. See Hjalmar Falk, *Odensheite*, Skrifter utgitt av det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo. II. Hist.-filos. klasse, 1924, 10 (Oslo, 1925).

28. Frederic Amory, “Kennings,” in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Pulsiano et al., 351–2.

29. For a list of occurrences of the “Freyja’s tears” kenning-type, see Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 329–30.

30. Egill Skallagrímsson, *Höfuðlausn* 22, *Skj* BI:33. This text is based upon the W manuscript of *Egils saga*, although in this instance there are no important differences between this reading and that of *Ketilsbók* (K).

31. Translated by Russell Poole, “Variants and Variability in Egill’s *Höfuðlausn*,” in *The Politics of Editing Medieval Texts: Papers given at the twenty-seventh annual Conference on Editorial Problems University of Toronto 1–2 November 1991*, ed. Roberta Frank (New York, 1993), 65–105, at 77–8.

32. *Ibid.*, 94–5.

33. Óláfr inn helgi Haraldsson, *Lausavísa* 9: *Skj* BI:212. In Finnur’s edition, this stanza is numbered as *Lausavísa* 11.

34. Translated by Russell Poole, “Some Royal Love-Verses,” *MM* 1985, 115–31, at 118.

35. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London, 2007), 20.

36. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:60–61. Although this particular stanza of *Bjarkamál in fornu* is only found in manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, two verses (numbers one and two in the current arrangement of the poem), absent from *Skáldskaparmál*, exist in other texts, including *Flateyjarbók*, *Fóstbræðra saga*, and *Óláfs saga helga*.

37. Judy Quinn, “*Eddu list*: The Emergence of Skaldic Pedagogy in Medieval Iceland,” *alv* 4 (1995): 69–92, esp. 72.

38. Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 311–19.

39. Edited and translated by Roberta Frank, “The *Málsháttakvæði* or ‘Proverb Poem’ Englished,” in *Poetry, Place, and Gender: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honor of Helen Damico*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov (Kalamazoo, Mich., 2009), 234–51.

40. On the attribution of the poem to Bjarni, see Bjarne Fidjestøl, “Bjarni Kolbeinsson,” in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Pulsiano, et al., 48.

41. See, for example, Markús Skeggjason, *Eiríksdrápa* 27/4; *krossmark viðum hnossa* is an occasional refrain in the anonymous *Líknarbraut* (stanzas 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, and 42); Gamli kanóki, *Harmsól* 4/2. The earliest occurrence of this word is found in Sigvatr Þórðarson’s *Poem about Queen Ástriðr*, stanza 1; otherwise, *hnoss* only appears in skaldic poems of the twelfth century or later. These readings are all taken from the skaldic poetry database.

42. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London, 2005), 29.

43. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Anthony Faulkes, Everyman Series (London, 1987), 30.

44. See *LP*, s.v.v. *Hörn* and *Gefn*.

45. The kenning *grátr Sýrar* (“weeping of Sýr”) is found in a *lausavísa* attributed to Ásdís Bárðardóttir in *Grettis saga*: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?id=3027&if=default&table=text&val=&view=>. There is no likelihood that this verse is substantially older than the fourteenth-century *saga*.

46. For a comprehensive—if traditional and somewhat uncritical—overview of Freyja’s many names in *Gylfaginning* and elsewhere, see Britt-Mari Näsström, “Freyja—A Goddess with Many Names,” in *The Concept of the Goddess*, ed. Sandra Billington and Miranda Green (London, 1996), 68–77; and Näsström, “The Goddesses in *Gylfaginning*,” in *Snorrastefna*, 25.—27. *Júlí* 1990, ed. Úlfar Bragason, Rit Stofnunar

Sigurðar Nordals 1 (Reykjavík, 1992), 193–203.

47. The kennings in question are *Sjöfn silfrbands* (Sjöfn of the silver-band), Gísli Súrsson, *Lausavísa* 35; *Sjöfn sauma* (Sjöfn of seams), Gísli, *Lausavísa* 17; *Sjöfn seims* (Sjöfn of wire [RICHES]), *Plácitusdrápa* 14.

48. In the most recent translation of *Þrymskviða*, Andy Orchard tentatively identifies Vár with Frigg, rather than Freyja: *The Elder Edda: A Book of Viking Lore*, trans. Orchard (London, 2011), 101.

49. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:114–15 (verses 433–5 in Faulkes's edition). In the skaldic database, this verse is listed as Anonymous *þulur* 11: *Ásynja heiti* 1–3. The text in square brackets is missing from the Codex Regius but is present in the other manuscripts.

50. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes, 157.

51. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:226–7.

52. On this passage see Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, *Frigg og Freyja: Kvenleg goðmögn í heiðnum sið*, Íslensk menning 4 (Reykjavík, 2007), 176–8.

53. It would be possible to include Gefn in the list of spurious Freyja-names on the basis of her (scarce) appearances in attested woman-kennings that do not demand a specific figure as a base word, but since the *þula*-poet includes her among his Freyja-*heiti*, the identity of the two goddesses here can be accepted.

54. See Kari Ellen Gade, “Skjalf,” *ANF* 100 (1985): 59–71.

55. Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. Angela Hall (Cambridge, 1993), s.v. “Hnoss.”

56. Einarr Skúlason, *Lausavísur* 14 and 15: *Skj* AI:652; *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century I: Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar (Laufás Edda)*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi*, Rit 13 (Reykjavík, 1979), 267.

57. Einarr Skúlason, *Geisli*, ed. Martin Chase, in *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 1:5–65, at 37 and 46.

58. *Ibid.*, 47.

59. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, 28–9.

60. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Faulkes, 29.

61. Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, s.v. “Fenrir.” On *Lokasenna* as a late poem and its relationship to *Snorra Edda*, see Christopher Abram, *Myths of the Pagan North: the Gods of the Norsemen* (London, 2011), 226–30; Franz Rolf Schröder, “Das Symposium der *Lokasenna*,” *ANF* 76 (1952): 1–29; Frog, “Snorri Sturluson *qua* Fulcrum: Perspectives on the Cultural Activity of Myth, Mythological Poetry and Narrative in Medieval Iceland,” *Mirator* 12 (2011): 1–28, esp. 12–17.

62. Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 233; see further *ibid.*, 341–2.

SKÁLDSKAPARMÁL AS A TOOL FOR COMPOSITION OF PSEUDONYMOUS SKALDIC POETRY / MIKAEL MALES

1. Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, *Safn Fræðifjelagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga* 9 (Copenhagen, 1934), 88–90, 142; Sverrir Tómasson, “Nýsköpun eða endurtekning? Íslensk skaldmennt og Snorra Edda fram til 1609,” in *Guðamjöldur og arnarleir. Safn ritgerða um eddulist*, ed. Sverrir Tómasson (Reykjavík, 1996), 1–64.

2. Bjarni Einarsson, “On the Rôle of Verse in Saga-Literature,” *MS* 7 (1974): 118–25. Roberta Frank and Margaret Clunies Ross see this distinction between corroborative and dramatic quotations as problematic and simplistic. See Frank, “Skaldic Poetry,” in Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, eds., *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching (Toronto, 2005; repr. of *Islandica* 45 [Ithaca, N.Y., 1985] with new preface), 157–96, at 173, and Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge, 2005), 71, 78–80. Though this observation is justified in some cases, stanzas that scholars have seen as spurious can almost always be classified as dramatic, at least in thirteenth-

century compositions (though this observation holds less true for fourteenth-century works like *Grettis saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*).

3. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, “The Prosimetrum Form 1: Verses as the Voice of the Past,” in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. Russell Poole (Berlin, 2001), 172–90, at 183–90.

4. Thus Cicero, *De inventione* 1.19.27; *Ad Herennium* 1.8.13; Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.44.5. For a thorough discussion of these and other distinctions between fact and fiction in Old Norse literature, see Ralph O’Connor, “History or Fiction? Truth-Claims and Defensive Narrators in Icelandic Romance-Sagas,” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 15 (2005): 101–69; Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum*, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 33 (Reykjavík, 1988), 245–60.

5. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London, 2005), 66, note on p. 34, lines 16–24; Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*, 10–11.

6. This discussion is taken mostly from my recent article where the arguments are given in full: Mikael Males, “Egill och Kormákr—tradering och nydiktning,” *MM* 2011: 115–46.

7. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: Edda Snorronis Sturlæi*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson et al., 3 vols. (Copenhagen, 1848, 1852, 1880–87; repr. Osnabrück, 1966), 3:251, 259; Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century* (Toronto, 2001), 314; Margaret Clunies Ross, “Bragi Boddason,” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano, Kirsten Wolf, Paul Acker, and Donald K. Fry (New York, 1993), 55–56.

8. *Skj* AI:1; *Skj* BI:1.

9. *Skj* AII:234 (V,1); *Skj* BII:254 (V,1).

10. *Skj* AII, 232 (II,1,5) (2,3) (3,1), 233 (4,3) (5,3) (6,5), 234 (IV,1,3) (2,7) (3,3) (V,1,1), 235 (V,2,5) (3,7), 236 (V,7,3) (10,1), 237 (VI,1,1), 238 (VI,3,1), 239 (VIII,1,5). I have included fronted hendings—when the latter hending falls before the fifth position—since that probably was intended as another archaic feature. This occurs in four instances: *Skj* AII:234 (IV,1,3) (2,7), 236 (V,10,1), 238 (VI,3,1).

11. Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen, 1920–24), 2:142; Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, 314. *Ragnarssona þáttr* is found in a section of Hauksbók datable to 1302–1310 (*ONP* Registre, 359). The *þáttr* seems to be an abbreviated version of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, containing some of the poetry found in the saga. The saga is also mentioned in the *þáttr*, and some form of the saga thus probably existed in the thirteenth century. The dating of the poetry in the saga is more thoroughly discussed in Mikael Males, “‘Archaic’ Assonance in the Strophes of Ragnarr Loðbrók’s Family and Other Early Skalds,” in *Á Austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference: Uppsala 9th–15th August 2009*, ed. Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams, and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gävle, 2009), 643–48. The most extensive study of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues*, Medium Ævum Monographs, n.s. 15 (Oxford, 1991), but McTurk does not discuss the dating of the poetry in the saga.

12. *Skj* AII:233 (II,4,3) (5,3, line identical to previous) (5,7) (6,6), 233 (IV,1,1), 239 (VIII,1,4), 239 (IX,2,1).

13. See Hans Kuhn, *Das Füllwort of-um im Altwestnordischen. Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der germanischen Präfixe: Ein Beitrag zur altgermanischen Metrik, Ergänzungshefte zur Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiet der indogermanischen Sprachen* 8 (Göttingen, 1929); Kari Ellen Gade, “The Dating and Attributions of Verses in the Skald Sagas,” in *Skaldsagas*, 50–74, at 55–65.

14. *Skj* AI:2; *Skj* BI:2.

15. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, ÍF 2 (Reykjavík, 1933).

16. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London, 1998), 1:40. A possibly archaic feature is onset in line 4 (í).

17. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, 119; *Skj* AI:50 (6); *Skj* BI:43 (6).

18. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London, 2007), 24–26.

19. Roberta Frank, “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” in *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense, 1981), 155–70, at 164–66.

20. Frank mentions one more case of the use of Snorri’s narrative to create “old” poetry, namely “Áms ok Austrá sáttir” (Ámr’s [a giant’s] and Austr’s [a dwarf’s] agreement [MEAD OF POETRY]) in a stanza in *Bandamanna saga*, a dramatic quotation put in the mouth of Ófeigr (Frank, “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” 166). The word *sátt*, *sætt* (agreement) is used once more in connection to the mead of poetry, namely in the prose of *Skáldskaparmál* (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:3). Of the six stanzas in the saga, at least five have been seen as spurious, including the stanza in question (Hallvard Magerøy, *Studiar i Bandamanna saga: Kring gjerd-problemet*, BA 18 [Copenhagen, 1957], 108–9; Magerøy, ed., *Bandamanna saga* [Oslo, 1981], lii–liii). Guðni Jónsson classifies this kenning as spurious in his edition (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar; Bandamanna saga; Odds Þáttur Ófeiggssonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, ÍF 7 [Reykjavík, 1936], xcvi). I see no reason to doubt Frank’s conclusion, but it somewhat complicates the issue that Snorri clearly did not invent the kenning type “ship of the dwarves [POETRY],” as it is found in a stanza quoted in *Skáldskaparmál* itself (Frank, “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” p. 166 n. 27; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:14). Snorri construes that ship as a metaphor for the settlement that saved the lives of the dwarves when they were abandoned on an islet soon to be swept by the tide; they paid their way out of there with the mead, which thus functioned as their “ship” (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:3–4). Actually, though, it seems that Snorri had no clear idea of the background to the kenning “ship of the dwarves,” and that he produced the settlement to explain it (Frank, “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” 164–66).

21. See Kristian Kålund, ed., *Sturlunga saga efter membranen Króksfjarðarbók udfylt efter Reykjarfjarðarbók* (Copenhagen, 1906–11), 340–41; *Skj* AII:140 (13); *Skj* BII:150 (13).

22. Because the stanza occurs in Reykjavík, AM 122 a fol. (Króksfjarðarbók) and in paper manuscripts derived from Reykjavík, AM 122 b fol. (Reykjarfjarðarbók), it is probably original to the saga (Kålund, ed., *Sturlunga saga*, xxxvi–xxxvii, xli–xlii, 340–41).

23. *Skj* AII:348–49 (2); *Skj* BII:372 (2).

24. ONP Registre, 471.

25. ONP Registre, 432.

26. Stefán Karlsson, “Kringum Kringlu,” in *Stafkrókar*, ed. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (Reykjavík, 2000 [1977]), 251–73, at 264–66.

27. ONP Registre, 433, 471.

28. Kari Ellen Gade, ed., *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 2*, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2*, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2009), 2:481.

29. Finnur Jónsson, *Ordbog til de af samfund til udg. af gml. nord. litteratur udgivne rímur samt til de av dr. O. Jiriczek udgivne Bósarímur*, SUGNL 51 (Copenhagen, 1926–28), s.v. “sandr,” p. 309; Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Rímnasafn: Samling af de ældste islandske rimer*, SUGNL 35, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1905–12), 1:231 (iv, 1); 2:232 (viii, 1), 485 (43). In two of these instances, the image of sand forms part of a *nýgerving* (sustained metaphor); this sand is the beach from where the ship of poetry goes to sea or against which it lands (1:231 (iv, 1); 2:485 (43)). The use of *sandr* may thus

be conditioned by a wish to achieve coherent imagery on the basis of existing kennings (“dwarfs’/giants’ ship [POETRY]” and “eagle’s mud [POETRY]”).

30. Finnur Jónsson, *Ordbog*, s.v. “leir,” pp. 236–37, once in the feminine form *leira*.

31. I here use the conventional abbreviations for manuscripts of Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál*. These are: A: Reykjavík, AM 748 I b 4to, ca. 1300–1325 (*ONP* Registre, 464); B: Reykjavík, AM 757 a 4to, ca. 1400 (*ONP* Registre, 464); C: Reykjavík, AM 748 II 4to, ca. 1400 (*ONP* Registre, 464); R: GKS 2367 4to (*Codex Regius*), ca. 1300–1350 (*ONP* Registre, 472); W: Copenhagen, AM 242 fol. (*Codex Wormianus*), ca. 1340–70 (*ONP* Registre, 438; Karl G. Johansson, *Studier i Codex Wormianus: Skriftradtition och avskriftsverksamhet vid ett isländskt skriptorium under 1300-talet* (Göteborg, 1997), 17–18); U: Uppsala, DG 11 4to (*Codex Upsaliensis*), ca. 1300–1325 (*ONP* Registre, 469).

32. DG 11 4to, 37 20.

33. It remains a possibility that the words in U “*ok heitir arnar leir*” are derived from either Þórarinn’s stanza or the anonymous one in *Íslendinga saga*, i.e. that the *Skáldskaparmál* narrative formed the basis for these kennings, but that their wording then made full circle back into *Skáldskaparmál*. Since the kenning in the latter stanza (“*sævar hrægammis leirr*” > “*hræsævar gammis leirr*” (the corpse-sea’s [BLOOD’S] vulture’s [EAGLE’S] mud [BAD POETRY])) is meant as an allusion to *Skáldskaparmál*, however, one would expect to find the base-word *leirr* there.

34. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, 275–76; *Skj* AI:48 (6); *Skj* BI:42 (6).

35. The stanza only occurs in Möðruvallabók (Reykjavík, AM 132 fol.). The kenning has also been construed with an emendation of the seemingly corrupt “*feysr*” to *fúrs* (of the fire,) that is, “the altar’s fire’s friend [ÓÐINN]” (see *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, 275–76).

36. This topos is well represented in Old Norse hagiography from the twelfth century on: s.vv. *stalli* and *stallr* in *ONP* (<http://www.onp.hum.ku.dk/>). A probable early reference to *stallr* is found in *Ynglingatal* 11, where the king is referred to as “*vǫðr vǫstalls*” (guardian of the altar of the sanctuary) (Diana Whaley, ed., *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1, 2 vols. [Turnhout, 2009], 1:26–27). Though it can be classified as a kenning, the phrase is descriptive rather than, as in Egill’s stanza, the product of an attempt to construct a new type of kenning for “poetry.” The argument about influence from hagiography cannot stand on its own, but is likely in view of other observations made here.

37. Most famous are Bragi’s *Ragnarsdrápa* and Þjóðólfr’s *Haustlǫng*, but the stanzas by Einarr Skúlason gathered under the name *Óxarflokkr*, though probably about an axe, deserve mention as well. On the shield poems and other ekphrastic poetry, see Margaret Clunies Ross, “Stylistic and Generic Identifiers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007): 159–92.

38. Mikael Males, “*Vellekla, dunhent och jónssonsk utgivning*,” in *Alla ska vara välkomna: Nordiska studier tillägnade Kristinn Jóhannesson*, ed. Auður Magnúsdóttir et al. (Gothenburg, 2008), 363–68, at 365.

39. See *ibid.*; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Faulkes, 82–83; Hans Kuhn, “Vor tausend Jahren. Zur Geschichte des skaldischen Innenreims,” in *Speculum Norroenum*, 291–309, at 298, 304–05.

40. I have retained “*gilja*” and “*jarðgróins*” where Finnur Jónsson has “*Gylfa*” and “*erðgróins*.” I have, however, accepted the emendation of “*ef þa er ek*” to “*es þák*.”

41. *Skj* AI:48; *Skj* BI:42.

42. On attempts to solve the unclear passage, see *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, 273.

43. Males, “*Egill och Kormákr*,” 133–34; Kuhn, “*Vor Tausend Jahren*,” 298–301.

44. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:3–5.

45. The encounter between the two is principally known from *Skáldskaparmál*, though there is also an eerie rendition of it in Saxo and an apocalyptic one in *Þorsteins saga bæjarmagns* (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:24–30; Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: Danmarkshistorien*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen and Peter Zeeberg [Copenhagen, 2005], 568–69; Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Fornaldar sögur norðurlanda*, 4 vols. [Reykjavík, 1950], 4:319–44).

46. The spelling “fiq̃” for “*fio” (normalized *síu*) is probably due to the preceding <q> in “geirrǫðr.” The spelling has in all likelihood not caused problems for understanding, as the gender of the word is marked by “þeiri” (*sjó* (sea) would thus be ungrammatical).

47. GKS 1009, fol. 15v 20–21; Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Morkinskinna*, SUGNL 53 (Copenhagen, 1932), 235; *Skj* AI (14):380; *Skj* BI:350 (14). Dating according to *ONP* Registre, 471.

48. Compare the commentary in Gade, ed., *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas* 2, 1:170–71. It should be noted, though, that the new edition of *Morkinskinna* retains the manuscript reading (Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, ed. *Morkinskinna*, ÍF 23–24, 2 vols. [Reykjavík, 2011], 1:271).

49. Other manuscripts read (normalized): “lyptisylg á lopti/langvinr síu þrøngvar” (the raised draught ...) (*Skj* AI:151 (17). Note that Finnur Jónsson here—strangely—has emended the main text (R), though he does report this in the apparatus). Whereas alteration in one hending will often result in alteration of that line’s other hending, such self-healing mechanisms are rare in alliteration—normally a more stable feature. Whatever reading is more original, the variation is clearly dictated by scribal error (confusion of <f> and <l>). Moving the word *síu*, however, lies beyond the written text and betrays the scribe as something of a poet.

50. GKS 2367 4to, 25r, 15–17; *Skj* AI:151; *Skj* BI:143.

51. The word *áss* (beam [in a house]) would point to an iron rod, rather than a lump.

52. *Arinbjarnarkviða* 6, 8 (*Skj* AI:44) and *Íslendingadrápa* 1, 6 (*Skj* AI:556) both have “hlusta munnum” ([drink the mead of poetry] with hearing’s mouths [EARS]). *Litla Skálda* has “Eyru manns er kallat hlustar auga eða sjónir” (a person’s ears are called the eye or sight of hearing) (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson et al., 2:430). I am not aware of other occurrences. These transpositions are reminiscent of topical expressions in the Christian tradition, such as the “gum” or “ear of the heart” (*palatum cordis, auris cordis*) in Gregory, and particularly of later and more uninhibited imagery, such as “the hands of the tongue” (*manus linguae*) in Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria nova* (see Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* [New York, 1961], 30; Edmond Faral, ed., *Les arts poétiques du xii^e et du xiii^e siècle: Recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du moyen âge*, Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des hautes études, Sciences historiques et philologiques, fasc. 238 [Paris, 1924], 260, line 2060). Monastic influence on *Þórðrápa*, though, seems highly unlikely, and these expressions have thus probably developed independently in skaldic poetry.

53. See Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica* 42 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978), 114. However, Diana Whaley refrains from drawing conclusions from the verbal similarities (Whaley, ed., “Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *Lausavísur*,” in Gade, ed., *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas* 2, 1:170).

54. *LP*, 497 translates *sía* in *Þórðrápa* as “iron rod” and Anthony Faulkes as “lump or glowing lump (of metal)” (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 2:385), which is how it may have been interpreted after the composition of *Skáldskaparmál*. This, however, is almost certainly wrong for earlier times, as will become evident below. *LP* (1860) does not give the occurrence in *Þórðrápa*, and the

translation “strictura” (glowing iron mass) is valid for Þjóðólfr’s stanza, though probably not for the other occurrence given, that of a variant reading of *Vafþrúðnismál* 31 (s.v. *sía*, pg. 701. See also Sophus Bugge, ed., *Norræn fornkvæði: Islandsk Samling af Folkelige Oldtidsdigte om Nordens Guder og Heroer Almindeligt Kaldet Sæmundar Edda hins Fróða* [Oslo, 1867], 70).

55. In the stanza, *sía* works on at least three levels: That of the smith, that of the kenning and thus the smithy, and that of Þórr and Geirrðór. It is likely that the meaning “spark” is alluded to on the first two levels, but *sía*, nonetheless, remains the syntactical object of *taka við* (to catch), which presupposes the meaning “glowing iron rod/lump”.

56. See Fritzner 2:234 and 3:223, to which ONP has added two (<http://www.onp.hum.ku.dk/>). Also LP, s.v. *sía*, p. 497; Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda: Based on Hans Kuhn’s Kurzes Wörterbuch*, Skandinavistische Arbeiten 15 (Heidelberg, 1992), s.v. *sía*, 227.

57. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:25. In U only the last occurrence lacks the prefix.

58. This view has been challenged in two major studies. Theodore Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade claim that there are no compelling reasons to see the *þættir* or stanzas of Morkinskinna as interpolated (Andersson and Gade, trans., *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1030–1157)* [New York, 2000], 13–14, 56), and Ármann Jakobsson makes the bold claim that Morkinskinna in all essentials is the work of one man around 1220, and that the depiction of Þjóðólfr Arnórsson is partly autobiographical (Ármann Jakobsson, *Staður í nýjum heimi: Konungasagan Morkinskinna* [Reykjavík, 2002], 283–85). Ármann repeats the claim that the *þættir* were part of the original compilation in the recent edition, ÍF 23, xlix–l. He argues, against earlier scholars, that the *þættir* serve various functions within the narrative and construes this as an argument in favor of their presence in the original. To the present author, the correlation between good and old, presupposed by both sides in the debate, remains to be proven. For a brief overview of the question, see Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, *Om de norske kongers sagaer*, Skrifter utgitt av det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, II. Hist.-filos. klasse, 1936, No. 4 (Oslo, 1937), 154–59.

59. There are no manuscripts until the end of the fifteenth century (ONP Registre, 256), so the stanzas might conceivably be younger than the fourteenth century. The large-scale composition of skaldic poetry at that time, however, seems unlikely.

60. *Grettis saga Ásmundarson*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, xxxi–xlii.

61. See, though somewhat differently expressed, Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, 69; for a more inclusive definition, see Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*, 111.

62. The argument for this cannot be given in full here, and the following brief observations may suffice: In the so-called Third Grammatical Treatise, two examples of demanding *ofljóst* are cited (Björn Magnússon Ólsen, ed., *Den tredje og fjerde grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda tilligemed de grammatiske afhandlingers prolog og to andre tillæg*, SUGNL 12 [Copenhagen, 1884], 66–67, 85). The stanzas themselves are ascribed to Einarr Skúlason and Hallar-Steinn, poets of the twelfth century with grammatical leanings (compare the variations of kennings for gold involving the goddess Freyja in Einarr’s so-called *Øxarflokkr* and the thorough application of the meter *tvískelft* in Hallar-Steinn’s *Reksteffja*). *Ofljóst* as demanding as this is not found in poetry that can with some confidence be considered early but, as the examples indicate, surfaces in the early “grammatical” poets and is later cherished by Óláfr Þórðarson the grammarian (on Old Norse vernacular *grammatica* generally, see Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*).

63. Manuscripts A, B, C, R, W, U.

64. *Grettis saga Ásmundarson*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, 171–72; *Skj* AI:310 (5,7; 7,1–3); *Skj* BI:287–88 (5,7; 7,1–3).

65. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:25.

66. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, 29. Examples of this tendency abound, e.g. his use of the hapax legomenon *arnsúgr* (eagle-sucking) about the noise of the wings of Þjazi in an eagle's shape, quoting *Haustlǫng*. (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:2, 33, 236).

67. A similar background may be suspected for some other sayings in Snorri's *Edda*, for instance “leysa ór Leiðingi” (let loose from Leyðingr) and “drepa ór Dróma” (strike out of Drómi) (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, 27–28).

68. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Faulkes, 6–7.

69. *Grettis saga Ásmundarson*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, 185; *Skj* AII:440 (33); *Skj* BII:471 (33).

70. Only the stanza has the word *naðra* and defines it with “battle.” Both stanza and commentary have *skríða*, but only in the commentary does the snake slither across the breast of men (in the stanza it slithers along the path of the scabbard). Both have *stígr* in comparable surroundings (Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Faulkes, 6–7).

71. Another instance can be found in *Íslendinga saga*: In her article, “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry” (162), Roberta Frank observes how Snorri interprets a stanza from Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla*. The stanza is quoted in *Skáldskaparmál*, and in it, one finds the kenning “berg-Saxa boðnar bára.” *Boðn* seems to be an obsolete word meaning “vessel” and cognate with Old English *byden* and Modern Icelandic *byðna* of the same meaning. The kenning is thus “the mountain-Saxons' [GIANTS'] vessel's wave [MEAD OF POETRY; POETRY].” Snorri, however, construes the kenning simply as “Boðnar bára” (“Boðn's wave [MEAD OF POETRY]”), probably reading “of the giants” as a redundant but welcome definer. (At least, Snorri can hardly have construed the stanza with the emendation of *hlýði* to *heyri* that later editors have made to accommodate Snorri's [supposed] reading of it. See Frank, “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” 162.) “Boðnar bára” is how the kenning reoccurs in *Íslendinga saga*, in a stanza ascribed to Snorri's brother Sigvatr. (*Skj* AII:46 [2,3]; *Skj* BII:54 [2,3]. The stanza occurs in Reykjavík, AM 122 a fol. [Króksfjarðarbók] and in paper manuscripts derived from Reykjavík, AM 122 b fol. [Reykjarfjarðarbók] and is probably original to the saga [cf. n. 22 above and Kálund, ed., *Sturlunga saga*, 511].) That kenning presupposes Snorri's reading of the stanza.

72. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:5.

HÁTTATAL STANZA 12 AND THE DIVINE LEGITIMATION OF KINGS / KEVIN J. WANNER

1. On these events and *Háttatal*'s dating, see Kevin J. Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*, Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series 4 (Toronto, 2008), 70–73, 99.

2. On the likely sequence of composition of the *Edda*'s parts, see *ibid.*, 99–101.

3. See, e.g., Sigurður Nordal, *Snorri Sturluson* (Reykjavík, 1920), 89–94; Theodor Möbius, ed., *Háttatal Snorra Sturlusonar*, 2 vols. (Halle, 1879–81), 1:40–42; Sverrir Tómasson, “Snorra Edda,” in *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga 1*, ed. Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson, and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík, 1992), 534–42, at 541; and Anthony Faulkes, “Introduction” to Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London, 2007), vii–xxiv.

4. Thomas Krömmelbein, “Snorri als Skalde. Studien zum *Háttatal*,” in *Germanic Dialects: Linguistic and Philological Investigations*, ed. Bela Brogyanyi and Thomas Krömmelbein (Amsterdam, 1986), 295–331; Guðrún Nordal, “Skáldið Snorri

Sturluson,” in *Snorrastefna: 25.–27. júlí 1990*, ed. Úlfar Bragason, Rit Stofnunar Sigurðar Nordals 1 (Reykjavík, 1992), 52–69; Heinz Klingenberg, “Hommage für Skúli Bárðarson,” in *Snorri Sturluson: Beiträge zu Werk und Rezeption*, ed. Hans Fix (Berlin, 1998), 57–96.

5. *Háttatal* is divided into three poems or *kvæði*: *kvæði* 1 (stanzas 1–30) praises Hákon, most of *kvæði* 2 and 3 (stanzas 31–66 and 68–95) praises Skúli, and the ends of *kvæði* 2 and 3 (stanzas 67 and 96–102) celebrate both patrons.

6. Klingenberg, “Hommage für Skúli Bárðarson,” 76–77.

7. Guðrún Nordal, “Skáldið Snorri Sturluson,” 59: “það er ekki einasta hið óhagstæða hlutfall lofsins sem borið er á Hákon, sem kann að hafa styggt hinn unga konung, heldur er lofið mjög torfundið í fyrstu þrjátíu vísunum.” All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

8. Bryan R. Wilson, *The Noble Savages: The Primitive Origins of Charisma and its Contemporary Survival* (Berkeley, 1975), 7. See also Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1968), 1:241–45.

9. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Faulkes, 10. In translating from the *Edda* I have relied heavily on Faulkes’s glossaries and consulted his translation: Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Anthony Faulkes, Everyman Series (London, 1987). To the extent that I modify his translations, my aim is to sacrifice readability and style to literalness.

10. Sturla Þórðarson, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* 46, in *Hákonar Saga and a Fragment of Magnús Saga*, ed. Gudbrand Vigfusson, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Ævi Scriptores* 88, *Icelandic Sagas* 2 (London, 1887), 43: “Lýsti þá erkibiskup skírslu ... ok lagði þar bann við hverjum manni, ef nökkurn mistrúnað legði þar á.” For the ordeal and events leading up to it, see chs. 39–45.

11. Krömmelbein, “Snorri als Skalde,” 310: “im *Ht.* findet sich das einzige christliche Element der gesamten Dichtung in Str. 12 ... Mit Ausnahme dieser einzigen Strophe (unter 102!) zeigt sich das *Ht.* als ausgesprochene ‘heidnische’ Dichtung.”

12. *Háttatal* 10–11: “jörð verr siklingr sverðum. Sundr rjúfa spjör undir ... Stökkur hauss af bol lausum ... Liggr skör sniðin ... Fær gotna vinr vitni valbjór afar stóran. Vargr tér ór ben bergja blóðdrykk ok grön rjóða.” Here and subsequently in the notes and text I do not indicate line divisions in poetry.

13. Ibid. 13–14: “rjóðvendils ... randa rœki-Njörð”; “rógleiks ... remmi-Týr.”

14. Sverre Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson’s Heimskringla* (Berkeley, 1991), 131; Aron Gurevich, “Saga and History: The ‘Historical Conception’ of Snorri Sturluson,” *Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (1971): 42–53, at 45. I have myself argued that *Heimskringla*’s author or compiler privileges “standards of legitimacy and right rule that predate and ... remain independent of the influence of clerical ideals or agents” (Kevin J. Wanner, “At Smyrja Konung til Veldis: Royal Legitimation in Snorri Sturluson’s *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar*,” *SBVS* 30 [2006]: 5–38, at 20).

15. See, e.g., Faulkes, “Introduction” to Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, xi.

16. Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols., ÍF 26 (Reykjavík, 1979), 1:5: “þat væri þá háð, en eigi lof.”

17. Krömmelbein, “Snorri als Skalde,” 313–20.

18. Guðrún Nordal, “Skáldið Snorri Sturluson,” 59: “afdráttarlaust.”

19. Ibid., 60: “guðleg gæfa konunga var auðvitað alkunn hugmynd á miðöldum.”

20. Klingenberg, “Hommage für Skúli Bárðarson,” 76, 74: “Der gebotene ständische Unterschied”; “Htk. 12 liest sich dann wie eine Paraphrase der Siegelinschrift Hákons *advers.*” The inscription is quoted from *ibid.*, 76.

21. I endorsed this view in a discussion of stanza 12 in my dissertation: Kevin J. Wanner, “The Distinguished Norseman: Snorri Sturluson, the *Edda*, and the

Conversion of Capital in Medieval Scandinavia” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2003), 266–68. While this discussion did not become part of my 2008 book, portions of it have been reworked for the present essay.

22. Jón Sigurðsson, ed., *Diplomatarium Islandicum: Íslenzk fornbréfasafn*, vol. 1, 834–1264 (Copenhagen, 1857), 291.

23. Jón Jóhannesson, *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth: Íslendinga saga*, trans. Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg, 1974), 190.

24. See Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*, 67–68.

25. On Jón’s and Þórlakr’s dispute and sources for it, see Kirsten Wolf, “Pride and Politics in Late-Twelfth-Century Iceland: The Sanctity of Bishop Þórlakr Þórhallsson,” in *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Thomas A. DuBois, Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series 3 (Toronto, 2008), 241–70, at 245–46. For the events of 1209, see Sturla Þórðarson, *Íslendinga saga* 24–27, in *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason, and Kristján Eldjárn, 2 vols. (Reykjavík, 1946), 1:251–57.

26. Möbius, ed., *Háttatal*, 1:41: “freigebigkeit und Gastfreundschaft, kriegesischer Sinn und Seetüchtigkeit.”

27. *Háttatal* 98: “veit ek ... þá er vell gefa, þröndum beita ok búa snekkjur ... unga jofra”; Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet* (Øvre Ervik, 1982), 252.

28. See, respectively, stanzas 6, 16 for Hákon, and 31, 41, 60, 76, 82 for Skúli; stanzas 1, 17, 26, 28 for Hákon, and 66, 84 for Skúli; and stanzas 17, 23, 26, 29 for Hákon, and 69, 83, 88–91 for Skúli.

29. See e.g., stanza 13 for Hákon and 82 for Skúli.

30. Bagge, *Society and Politics*, 86–87.

31. Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat 1130–1319*, *Handbok i Norges Historie* 1 (Oslo, 1974), 45–52.

32. *Háttatal* 2, 18, 15: “þeim er ... (drótt man enn þann) átti áðr faðir ráða.”

33. Ibid. 33, 34, 69: “hilmis bróður”; “bragnings bróðir”; “konungs bróður.” Faulkes renders each phrase thus in his *Edda* translation, 187–88, 206.

34. *Skáldskaparmál* 64, in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London, 1997), 1:101: “urðu svá ágætir í hernaði at ... eru nōfn þeira haldin fyrir tignarnōfn svá sem konungs nafn eða nafn jarls. Þeir áttu engi börn ok fellu allir í orrostum.”

35. Klingenberg, “Hommage für Skúli Bárðarson,” 75: “den Gedanken der Ansippung an sagenberühmte Fürstengeschlechter implizierten. Damit schient Snorri der virulenten Deszendenz- und Legitimitätsproblematik beider Herrscher Norwegens diplomatisch auszuweichen.”

36. Möbius ed., *Háttatal*, 1:41: “..., zu denen sich auch noch das Glück (*gæfa*, *gipt* od. *happ*) gesellt.”

37. *Háttatal* 40, 93: “Hverr gerir hōpp at stœrri? ... hann á hōpp at sýnni”; “Þengill lætr hōpp hrest.”

38. Ibid. 99: “þeir ró jōfrar alvitrastir, hringum hæztir, hugrakkastir, vellum verstir, vígdjarfastir, hirð hollastir, happi næstir.”

39. See the entry for *happ* in Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1957): “good luck, but with the notion of *hap*, chance.”

40. *Háttatal* 1.

41. Walter Baetke, “Zur Frage des altnordischen Sakralkönigtum,” in *Kleine Schriften: Geschichte, Recht und Religion in germanischem Schrifttum*, ed. Kurt Rudolph and Ernst Walter (Weimar, 1973), 143–94, at 152–53: “diese Begriffe keineswegs eine feste Beziehung zum Königtum haben. Unter den Königen—wie unter allen Menschen—haben einige Glück, einige nicht.”

42. R. W. McTurk, “Sacral Kingship in Ancient Scandinavia: A Review of Some

Recent Writings,” *SBVS* 19 (1974): 139–69, at 160.

43. Faulkes’s rendering of *skóp* in his *Edda* translation, 175.

44. Krömmelbein, “Snorri als Skalde,” 310: “das Land, über das König Hákon gebietet, wird als Lehen Gottes aufgefaßt.”

45. Peter Hallberg, “The Concept of *Gipta-Gæfa-Hamingja* in Old Norse Literature,” in *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, University of Edinburgh, 1971*, ed. Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson, and Desmond Slay (London, 1973), 143–83, at 165–66. I have substituted italics for underlining in the original.

46. *Formáli* 1, 3, in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London, 2005), 3–4: “eigi at síðr veitti guð þeim jarðligar giptir”; “mið veröldin ... mest tignat af öllum giptum, spekinni ok aflinu, fegrðinni ok alls kostar kunnustu.”

47. *Hákonarkviða* 25, in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas* 2, ed. Kari Ellen Gade, 2 vols., *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 2 (Turnhout, 2007), 2:718: “sú kom gipt af guðs syni yfir Hákon heilli góðu, er allvald öflgrar kristni fyrirmaðr ... vígði, ... at boði páfa.” The translation is slightly adapted from Gade’s.

48. *Ibid.* 9, 2:706: “hvarbrigð á hann sneri aldar gipt auðnu hvéli.”

49. See stanzas 90–94 in particular for Skúli, and stanzas 97–98 for superlatives applied to both.

50. Wolfgang Lange, *Studien zur christlichen Dichtung der Nordgermanen 1000–1200*, Palaestra 222 (Göttingen, 1958), 33: “eingeklammerten Floskel ... gleichsam als Dreingabe und Zugeständnis an den Geist der Zeit und den Wunsch des Gönners.”

51. *Ibid.*, 89: “die Schlußstrophe des Anonymus is nicht mehr Floskel in der Randzone.”

52. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Faulkes, 52 note to 8/45.

53. *Ibid.*, 10: “en annat ok it þriðja vísuorð er sér um mál, ok er þat stál kallat.”

54. Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge, 2005), 85.

55. *Ibid.*, 39.

56. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, Aurelii Augustini Opera 13:1, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 44 (Turnhout, 1970), 1.2.2–3.

57. *Ibid.* 1.2.16: “quod nulla est iniquitas apud Deum.” Translation from *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, ed. Raymond Canning, trans. Boniface Ramsey, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* 1/12 (New York, 2004), 197.

58. *Ibid.*, 1.2.22: “certe ita occulta est haec electio ... Non enim habeo quod intuear in eligendis hominibus ad gratiam salutarem, si ad examen huius electionis aliqua cogitatione permittor, nisi uel maius ingenium, uel minora peccata uel utrumque. Addamus etiam, si placet, honestas utilesque doctrinas ... Sed cum hoc statuero, ita me ridebit ... pudore.” Translation from Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. (Berkeley, 2000), 149.

59. Quoted from Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* 2.2.1: “penitet me quod constituerim regem Saul.” Translation by Ramsey, from *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, 220 (italics removed).

60. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* 2.2.4: “cum enim paenitere dicitur, uult non esse aliquid, sicut fecerat ut esset.” Translation by Ramsey, from *Responses to Miscellaneous Questions*, 224.

61. Skúli’s death is narrated in ch. 241 of *Hákonar saga*, Snorri’s in ch. 151 of *Íslendinga saga*.

1. See Mikael Males, “*Skáldskaparmál* as a Tool for Composition of Pseudonymous Skaldic Poetry” in this volume.
2. The term is introduced in Siegfried Beyschlag, “Möglichkeiten mündlicher Überlieferung in der Königssaga,” *ANF* 68 (1953): 109–39.
3. On the evidence for Oddr’s authorship, see *Færeyinga Saga; Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar eftir Odd munk Snorrason*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, ÍF 25 (Reykjavík, 2006), clxxxiii–iv. (hereafter: *Óláfs saga Odds*).
4. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 3 vols., EA, Series A, 1–3 (Copenhagen 1958–2000), 3:64.
5. There are three primary sources of the now lost translation of the saga: Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 4to nr. 18 (= S); Copenhagen, AM 310 4to (= A); Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek, DG 4–7 (= U). All these versions are fragmentary. See *Óláfs saga Odds*, cxliii–clii.
6. For a meticulous discussion of what is preserved of Gunnlaugr’s text in the extant saga, see Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, *Om de norske kongers sagaer*, Skrifter utgitt av det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, II, Hist.-filos. klasse, 1936, No. 4 (Oslo, 1937), 88–120.
7. Cf. Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, Universitetet i Bergen, Nordisk institutts skriftserie 11 (Øvre Ervik, 1982), 24.
8. The exception is a *níð* verse by a certain Stefnir, which Oddr translated from Latin. See *Óláfs saga Odds*: 308–10.
9. See Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto, 2001), 168–9.
10. Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, eds., *Historia Norwegie* (Copenhagen, 2003), 24.
11. Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium. An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*, trans. David and Ian McDougall, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 11 (London, 1998), xiii.
12. *Ibid.*, xvii.
13. M. J. Driscoll, ed. and trans., *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum: A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway*, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 10 (London, 1995), xii.
14. Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, 20.
15. For a close reading of the verses in *Ágrip*, see Heather O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (New York, 2005), 23–45.
16. *Ágrip*, ed. Driscoll, xvii.
17. Oddr Snorrason, *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, trans. Theodore M. Andersson, *Islandica* 52 (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003), 6–14.
18. For a list of informants supposedly used by both Oddr and Gunnlaugr in their texts, see Ólafur Halldórson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 3:66.
19. Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir, “Fagrskinna,” *RGA* 8:149. This fourteenth-century manuscript was destroyed in the Copenhagen fire of 1728; its contents are preserved in a number of early modern transcripts.
20. *Fagrskinna: A Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, trans. Alison Finlay, *The Northern World* 7 (Leiden, 2004), 10.
21. Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, 24–5.
22. *Ibid.*
23. See *Óláfs saga Odds*, clii–clxvi; see also Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Ólafs sögur Tryggvasonar: um gerðir þeirra, heimildir og höfunda*, (Reykjavík, 2005), 39.
24. Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, 24–5.
25. Diana Whaley, *Heimskringla: An Introduction*, Viking Society for Northern

Research Text Series 8 (London, 1991), 13.

26. Sverrir Tómasson, “Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar,” *RGA* 22:67.

27. Diana Whaley, “Óláfsdrápur,” *RGA* 22:69.

28. Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, 30.

29. Sigvaldi is part of the conspiracy against King Óláfr Tryggvason and plays an important role in tricking Óláfr into the ambush; he is consistently portrayed as having a somewhat cowardly attitude. This is underlined by a verse by an otherwise unknown Icelandic named Stefnir, in which Sigvaldi is called a *níðingr* (*Óláfs saga Odds*, 308). Earlier in the saga (*ibid.*, 305) the narrator refers to Skúli, without quoting any verse, and reports that King Óláfr’s enemies comprise two kings, the Swedish King Óláfr and the Danish King Sveinn Forkbeard, as well as the two earls and sons of Earl Hákon, Eiríkr and Sveinn; however, Sveinn Hákonarson is not mentioned later and is perhaps confused with Earl Sigvaldi (*ibid.*, cxxvi).

30. *Ibid.*, 324–25.

31. Translation by Kate Heslop, “Skúli Þorsteinsson,” *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, ed. Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 3 (Turnhout, forthcoming).

32. Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, 166.

33. O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse*, 4.

34. Bjarni Einarsson, “On the role of verse in saga-literature,” *MS* 6 (1974): 118–25.

35. Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative*, *Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations* 8 (Toronto, 1991), 6.

36. See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, *New Accents* (London, 1984), 94–5, 101–3.

37. Cf. Andersson, *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, 20–26.

38. *Ágrip af Noregskonunga Sögum; Fagurskinna—Noregs Konunga Tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, *ÍF* 29 (Reykjavík, 1984), 154.

39. Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, 166.

40. Cf. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London, 1998), 1:39, 43, 60, 91–2.

41. For another view on this, see Sveinbjörn Rafnsson, *Óláfs sögur Tryggvasonar*, 41–42.

42. See *Hallfreðar saga*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, *Rit* 15 (Reykjavík, 1977).

43. *Óláfs saga Odds*, 350–1; also in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 2:292

44. Whaley, “Óláfsdrápur,” 70.

45. Cf. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes, 1:191.

46. “Rekstefja,” ed. Rolf Stavnem, in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas* 1, ed. Diana Whaley, 2 vols., *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 1 (Turnhout, 2012), 2:893–939.

47. See Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 3:xvii.

48. “Rekstefja,” ed. Stavnem, 924.

49. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 2:290–93.

50. Cf. the detailed discussion of this verse in “Rekstefja,” ed. Stavnem, 922.

51. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 1:110.

52. *Ibid.*, 2:263.

53. “Þess getr Hallar steinn. at Sueinn kongr lagdi at Olafi kongi Tryggva syni med .lx. skipa. þa er Olafur suænski hafði adr bariz uid nafna sinn ok flyít vndan med lid sítt. ok segir sua:” (Hallar-Steinn relates that King Sveinn attacked King Óláfr Tryggvason with sixty ships, there where Óláfr the Swede previously had battled his namesake and fled with his fleet.) (*ibid.*, 2:265).

54. Cf. Kate Heslop, “Assembling the Olaf-archive? Verses in Óláfs saga

Tryggvasonar en mesta,” *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles*, Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference (Durham and York, 2006), 381–9. Heslop also discusses the reordering of the verses, though with the point that “Sveinn’s and Óláfr skötkonungr’s attacks are telescoped together and jointly overshadowed by the extended narrative of Eirekr jarl’s fierce attack,” 386.

55. This is the order as the verses appear in MS Copenhagen, AM 61 fol.; the verse order varies slightly across manuscripts.

56. “Rekstefja,” ed. Stavnem, 922.

57. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 2:282–83.

58. *Einarr Skúlason’s Geisli: A Critical Edition*, ed. Martin Chase, Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series 1 (Toronto, 2005), 10.

59. Cf. Wolfgang Lange, *Studien zur Christlichen Dichtung der Nordgermanen 1000–1200*, Palaestra 222 (Göttingen, 1958), 112.
60. “Rekstefja,” ed. Stavnem, 893.
61. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 2:234–6.
62. *Óláfs saga Odds*, 125.
63. “Rekstefja,” ed. Stavnem, 933.
64. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 1:110, 116.
65. Bergsbók (Stockholm, perg. 1 fol.), fol. 111va.
66. Heslop, “Assembling the Olaf-archive?,” 387–8.
67. Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, 1:110.
68. Heslop, “Assembling the Olaf-archive?,” 387.

RATTUS RATTUS AS A BEAST OF BATTLE? STANZA 12 OF RAGNARS SAGA / RORY McTURK

1. For accounts of these, see Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues*, Medium Ævum Monographs, n.s. 15 (Oxford, 1991), 54–56, and R.W. McTurk, “Ragnars saga loðbrókar,” RGA 24:108–12.

2. I say “arguably at least” because Elizabeth Ashman Rowe has recently argued against the view that *Ragnarssona þátr* reflects a lost older *Ragnars saga*; see her article “Ragnars saga loðbrókar, Ragnarssona þátr, and the Political World of Haukr Erlendsson,” in *Fornaldarsagaerne: myter og virkelighed. Studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Agnete Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Annette Lassen (Copenhagen, 2009), 347–60.

3. See further McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga*, 56; Stefán Karlsson, “Hauksbók,” in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano, Kirsten Wolf, Paul Acker, and Donald K. Fry (New York, 1993), 271–72.

4. The seven stanzas in question are those numbered, 11, 13, 18–22 in Magnus Olsen’s edition of *Ragnars saga*, i.e. *Volsunga saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ed. Magnus Olsen, SUGNL 36 (Copenhagen, 1906–08), 139, 140, 143–46, 203, 204–5, 208–10. Five of these, nos. 18–22, are also preserved in Reykjavík, AM 147, 4to (see the next note).

5. It is thanks to the work of Soffía Guðný Guðmundsdóttir that I am able to state with confidence that traces of as many as twenty-one of these *dróttkvætt* stanzas can be discerned in the text of *Ragnars saga* preserved in AM 147 4to. Magnus Olsen in his edition of *Ragnars saga* (*Volsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 176–212), identified traces of only sixteen of them, i.e. those numbered by him 1, 6–10, 15–16, 18–20, 22–6. Soffía, who has subjected to close analysis the verses fragmentarily preserved in this manuscript’s text of *Ragnars saga*, has also found traces of the stanzas numbered by Olsen 2, 3, 17, 21, and 27. Soffía has been assisting me under the auspices of the Skaldic Project (led by Margaret Clunies Ross) in the preparation of my edition for that project of the verses of *Ragnars saga*, to be published in Clunies Ross, ed., *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 8 (Turnhout, forthcoming). I am glad of this opportunity of placing on record my deep gratitude to Soffía for the care and conscientiousness with which she has undertaken this task.

6. The manuscripts so far mentioned may be regarded for the purposes of this paper as the only ones that have independent value as texts of the verses of *Ragnars saga*. 43 paper manuscripts of *Ragnars saga* are also known (as of April 2012) to exist, and I have so far inspected 27 of these, finding that those 27 all reflect the Y redaction of the saga and appear to derive ultimately from NKS 1824 b 4to. It is assumed for present purposes that all 43 paper manuscripts descend directly or indirectly from that manuscript.

7. This transcription of the stanza, which is my own, may be compared with that in *Volsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 139–40, from which it differs very little.

8. See *Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 139.

9. Roberta Frank, “The Battle of Maldon and Heroic Literature,” in *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford, 1991), 196–207, at 201.

10. Respectively: *Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 203–04; *Skj* AII:235, BII:254; and Kock, Ernst Albin, ed., *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 2 vols. (Lund, 1946–50), 2:132; idem, *Notationes Norrænæ: Anteckningar till Edda och skaldediktning*, Lunds Universitets årsskrift, n. s., sec. 1 (Lund, 1923–44), §1454 [henceforth NN].

11. See *Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 203–5.

12. Respectively: Severin Eskeland, ed. and trans., *Soga om Ragnar Lodbrok med Kråka-kvædet. Gamalnorsk grunntekst og nynorsk omsetjing*, Norrøne bokverk 16, 2nd ed. (Oslo, 1944), 64–65; Örnólfur Thorsson, ed., *Völsunga saga og Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (Reykjavík, 1985), 124; and Uwe Ebel, ed., *Ragnars saga loðbrókar. Völsunga saga. 2. Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, Texte des skandinavischen Mittelalters 4 (Metelen, Steinfurt, 2003) [= Vol. 2 of Ebel, ed., *Völsunga saga. Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, Texte des skandinavischen Mittelalters 3–4 (Metelen, Steinfurt, 1997–2003)].

13. Danish: “skönt det er dårlig gengæld.” *Skj* BII:254.

14. In Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, 4 vols., Íslendingasagnaútgáfan (n.p., 1950), 1:250.

15. Kock, *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 2:132; NN §1454.

16. See *Skj* BI:669. On the dating of the *þulur*, see Hallvard Lie, “Tanker omkring en ‘ekte’ replikk i Eyrbyggjasaga,” *ANF* 65 (1950): 160–77, at 165–66. (The article is reprinted in Hallvard Lie, *Om sagakunst og skaldskap. Utvalgte avhandlinger* [Øvre Ervik, 1982], 342–59.)

17. *LP* (2nd ed., 1931; repr., 1966), s.v. “hríðr.”

18. It is necessary to emphasize that *Bjarkamál* is an “Old Norse poem” since the title is also applied (for instance by Inge Skovgaard-Petersen in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Pulsiano et al. [New York, 1993], 46–47) to an exchange of verses in Latin hexameters between two warriors, one of them named Biarco (Bjarki), that forms part of Book II of Saxo Grammaticus’s *Gesta Danorum*. It has been shown, however, by Karsten Friis-Jensen that these verses are very much Saxo’s own composition, and only tenuously related to the Old Norse poem known by the title (Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet: Studies in the Verse Passages of the Gesta Danorum*, *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici*, Supplementum 14 [Rome, 1987], 64–101).

19. *Skj* BI:171.

20. The relevant articles by Klaus von See are: “Hastings, Stiklastaðir und Langemarck: Zur Überlieferung vom Vortrag heroischer Lieder auf dem Schlachtfeld,” *GRM* 55, n. s. 26 (1976): 1–13; and “*Húskarla hvqt*: Nochmals zum Alter der *Bjarkamál*,” in *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense, 1981): 421–31. Both are reprinted in Klaus von See, *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung: Aufsätze zur skandinavischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, *Skandinavistische Arbeiten* 6 (Heidelberg, 1981), 259–82.

21. Margaret Clunies Ross’s forthcoming edition of these stanzas is accessible on the Internet by contributors to the Skaldic Project, and was accessed most recently by the present writer in January 2012. While Clunies Ross does not exclude the possibility of a tenth-century dating for the lines in question, her emphasis in the introduction to her edition on the unusual character of the cat-kenning in these lines, and on that of the kenning *haddr jarðar* (tresses of the earth [GRASS]) in stanza 3, implies a suspicion on her part that these parts of the poem (numbered 3 and 7) are not as old as the tenth century.

22. See Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century. I: Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar (Laufás Edda)*, *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi*, Rit 13

(Reykjavík, 1979), 265, 341.

23. I am grateful to Margaret Clunies Ross for drawing my attention to the fact, noted in Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, that a kenning with an animal as its basic word and with part of a house (such as a wall) as its determinant can signify a house, as in the case of *veggjar vigg* (the steed of the wall) in Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa* (ca. A.D. 1000) and in one of the *lausavísur* attributed to Gunnlaugr ormsunga (d. 1008) (*Skj* BI:139, 186). (Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*, Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde 1 [Bonn, 1921; repr., Hildesheim, 1984], 430). It is difficult to see how sense could be made of this interpretation of the kenning *hríðr veggja* (ox of walls) in the present context, however.

24. See the article by Ole Jørgen Benedictow on "Plague" in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Pulsiano et al. (New York, 1993), 505–10, at 506.

25. *LP*, s.v. "slíta."

26. The quotations are from Diana Whaley's edition of the poem in Kari Ellen Gade, ed., *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2*, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2*, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2009), 1:251.

27. See Joseph Harris, "Eddic Poetry," in Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, eds., *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching (Toronto, 2005; repr. of *Islandica* 45 [Ithaca, N.Y., 1985] with new preface), 68–156, at 101.

28. References to *Helreið Brynhildar* are to Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, eds., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern 1: Text*, Germanische Bibliothek (fourth series: texts), 5th ed. (Heidelberg, 1983), 219–22, at 221, 222.

29. The as yet unpublished entry for "gjalla" in *ONP* (<http://dataonp.hum.ku.dk/index.html>, s.v. "gjalla"), lists four instances of this verb as used of a bull or bulls, one of them in the context of the noise made by a calf (in *Eyrbyggja saga*, see *Eyrbyggja Saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, ÍF 4 [Reykjavík, 1935], 172; cf. also *Grœnlendinga saga*, *ibid.*: 261). It is of some interest in the present context that it also lists an instance from NKS 1824 b—occurring in *Völsunga saga*, to which *Ragnars saga* forms a sequel in that manuscript—of the verb *gjalla* as used of the yelping of puppies; see *Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 90, line 14.

30. Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1957), s.v. "gjalla."

31. *Fritzner*, s.v. "gjalla."

32. See *Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 139, 203.

33. *Skj* BI:678 (cf. *LP*, s.v. "öldungr").

34. *Skj* BI:15.

35. See McTurk, *Studies*, 199–202.

36. Examples are stanzas 3/2, 4/5, 13/8 (if resolution of the two syllables of *mogum* into one is assumed), and (if elision of *þó at* is assumed) 19/6, as numbered by stanza (though not by line) in the diplomatic text of *Ragnars saga* in *Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 111–75. Note that it is Olsen's diplomatic text—as opposed to his "corrected" version of the stanzas on pp. 195–222 of his edition—that illustrates these examples. Cf. *Skj* AII:232–42, where, however, the stanza numbering is different.

37. These are stanzas 19/7–8 and 28/5–6 as numbered by stanza in Olsen's edition.

38. These are stanzas 13/7, 16/5, and 35/7 as numbered by stanza in Olsen's edition. I leave out of account here the anomalous case of stanza 21, the opening lines of which, as preserved in NKS 1824 b 4to, show no lack of linking alliteration, but are irregular in other respects; see further McTurk, *Studies*, 201–2.

39. The lines in question, in normalized spelling, are: *hann fari suðr um sanda / ok*

sé hvar vér létum ... “let him go south over the sands and (let him) see where we left behind ...,” where *sé*, omitted in the manuscript, is supplied by emendation. Here *hann*, the subject of *fari* in *hann fari* “let him go” is a raven, and what has been “left behind” is blood shed in battle. *Sé*, the monosyllabic third person singular present subjunctive of *sjá* “to see,” follows on naturally in person, tense, and mood from *fari*, makes perfect sense in the context, brings the number of syllables in line 6 from five to six, and in beginning with *s* supplies the head-stave that would be expected to have determined the internal alliteration on *s* in the preceding line. It is difficult indeed to see what other word could possibly have made good the omission in the manuscript. See *Skj* AII:239, BII:258; Kock, *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 2:134; and contrast *Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 160, 213–14.

40. Cf. Geoffrey Russom, *Beowulf and Old Germanic Metre*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 23 (Cambridge, 1998), 64.

41. See *Hauksbók udgiven efter de Arnamagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4^e samt forskellige papirhåndskrifter*, ed. Finnur Jónson (Copenhagen, 1892–96), 460.

42. See note 36 above.

43. Editors of the verses of *Ragnars saga*, from and including Olsen onwards (*Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 195–222, at 204–5), have adopted the *Hauksbók* reading here.

44. I use the expression “has allowed for a departure from” rather than “has departed from” (cf. also my use of the term “disregard” in the penultimate paragraph of this essay) to allow for the possibility that either the Y redactor or the scribe of NKS 1824 b may have inherited rather than initiated the defective form in which these lines are preserved in that manuscript.

45. Cf. *Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 144. Most editors follow *Hauksbók* and AM 147 4to here in reversing the order of the words *eigi* and *Uppsölum*, thus giving the line a truly trochaic ending with a long, fully stressed penultimate syllable.

46. Respectively, *Hauksbók*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 461; and *Völsunga saga*, ed. Olsen, 183.

47. The conjunction *ef* (if), which begins the line, cannot be regarded as a carrier of alliteration since it initiates a line of C type and is clearly unstressed; see Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*, *Islandica* 49 (Ithaca, N.Y., and London, 1995), 123–28.

48. See Folke Ström, *Diser, nornor, valkyrjor: fruktbarhets kult och sakralt kungadöme i Norden*, *Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar, Filologisk-filosofiska serien* 1 (Stockholm, 1954), 70–79.

49. Editors from Olsen onwards have adopted the readings of *Hauksbók* and AM 147 4to here, with the partial exception of *Völsunga saga*, ed. Örnólfur Thorsson (at 128), which retains from NKS 1824b the word *svá* (Modern Icelandic *svo*) in line 7, reading it as *ef svo duga eggjar* (if sword-edges come up to standard).

50. By “accessible only in NKS 1824 b” I mean, of course, that among those manuscripts which have independent value it is only in this one, NKS 1824 b, that this stanza is accessible.

WIT AND WISDOM: THE WORLDVIEW OF THE OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC RIDDLES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO EDDIC POETRY / HANNAH BURROWS

1. Editions and translations of the riddles are my own, being prepared for volume 8, *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, of *Skaldic Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2007–). I am grateful to the General Editors for permission to quote from this material. The editions and translations used in this paper may not be identical to the final form of the editions published there. All other translations from Old Norse are likewise my own.

2. E.g. H. R. Ellis Davidson, "Insults and Riddles in the *Edda* Poems," in *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, ed. R. J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg, 1983), 25–46; Maria Elena Ruggerini, "Appendix: A Stylistic and Typological Approach to *Vafþrúðnismál*," in John McKinnell, *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late North Heathenism* (Rome, 1994), 139–87.
3. Hannah Burrows, "Enigma Variations: *Hervarar saga*'s Wave-Riddles and Supernatural Women in Old Norse Poetic Tradition," *JEGP* 112 (2013): 194–216.
4. See, e.g., Archer Taylor, "The Riddle," *California Folklore Quarterly* 2 (1943): 129–47; Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier, trans., *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, with an Appendix by Neil Wright (Cambridge, 1985), 62.
5. Eleanor Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature* (Cambridge, 2006).
6. *Ibid.*, 236–40.
7. *Ibid.*, 243.
8. *Ibid.*, 226.
9. Cf. *Fáfnismál*, where "Sigurðr dulði nafni síns, fyr því at þat var trúa þeira í fornescio, at orð feigs mannz mætti mikit, ef hann þolvaði óvin sínóm með nafni" (Sigurðr concealed his name, because it was their belief in the old times that the words of a man doomed to die were able to do much, if he cursed his enemy by name) (Neckel and Kuhn, eds., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, 2 vols., I: *Text*, Germanische Bibliothek, 4th series: texts, 5th ed., (Heidelberg, 1983), 180.
10. McKinnell, *Both One and Many*, 94.
11. *Vafþrúðnismál*, ed. Tim William Machan, 2nd ed. (Durham and Toronto, 2008), 35.
12. E.g. Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1999), 194–201; Zoja Pavlovskis, "The Riddler's Microcosm: From Symphosius to St. Boniface," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 39 (1988): 218–51, at 221–22.
13. Cf. Burrows, "Enigma Variations."
14. Morton Bloomfield, "Understanding Old English Poetry," *Annuaire Mediaeval* 9 (1968): 5–25, at 17.
15. Elli Köngäs Maranda, "Theory and Practice of Riddle Analysis," *Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971): 51–61, at 53.
16. E.g. Dan Pagis, "Toward a Theory of the Literary Riddle," in *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Enigmatic Modes*, ed. Galit Hasan-Rokem and David Shulman (New York, 1996), 98; Patrick J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (Pennsylvania, 2011), 33, 110.
17. See e.g. *Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, Icelandic Texts Series (London, 1960), 90.
18. Alaric Hall, "Changing Style and Changing Meaning: Icelandic Historiography and the Medieval Redactions of *Heiðreks saga*," *SS* 77 (2005): 1–30, at 10.
19. See Burrows, "Enigma Variations, 195–96."
20. Neckel and Kuhn, eds., *Edda*, 49–51.
21. *Ibid.*, 60–61.
22. *Ibid.*, 60.
23. *Ibid.*, 61.
24. Carolyne Larrington, "*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*: Cosmic History, Cosmic Geography," in *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York, 2002), 59–77, at 63.
25. Carolyne Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomie Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford, 1993), 1.
26. Larrington, "*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*," 63.
27. Christopher Hale describes *Grímnismál* as "a didactic poem ostensibly giving the reader or listener mythological knowledge." ("The River Names in *Grímnismál*

27–29,” in *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, ed. R. J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason [Winnipeg, 1983], 165–86, at 182.)

28. McKinnell, *Both One and Many*, 96.

29. Clunies Ross, ed., *Poetry in fornaldarsögur* (Turnhout, forthcoming).

30. For further details of the relative merits of the different versions, see the Introduction to my edition of the riddles in Clunies Ross, ed., *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*.

31. E.g. Hale, “The River Names,” 164–65.

32. Larrington, “*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*,” 63.

33. Hall, “Changing Style,” 10.

34. Sverrir Jakobsson, “Hauksbók and the Construction of an Icelandic World View,” *SBVS* 31 (2007), 22–38, at 24.

35. Larrington, “*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*,” 63.

36. Some of the language used to create these echoes has direct parallels in eddic poetry, including in *Vafþrúðnismál*. See Burrows, “Enigma Variations.”

37. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 2nd ed., ed. Anthony Faulkes (London, 2005), 14.

38. Neckel and Kuhn, eds., *Edda*, 65.

39. On the various wolves in Norse mythology see Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. Angela Hall (Cambridge, 1993), 80.

40. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London, 2005), 17. The latter story is also related in *Gylfaginning*; for the story of Sleipnir’s conception, see Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, 34–5.

41. Taylor, “The Riddle,” 142.

42. On *hnefatafl*, and for other references, see Sten Helmfrid, “Hnefatafl—the Strategic Board Game of the Vikings,” <http://hem.bredband.net/b512479/>.

43. Tolkien, *Heiðreks saga*, 37 n. 6.

44. Editions of the *þulur* by Elena Gurevich are forthcoming in *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, ed. Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3* (Turnhout, forthcoming).

45. Tolkien, ed., *Heiðreks saga*, 37 n. 6; Ursula Dronke, ed. and trans., *The Poetic Edda 2: Mythological Poems* (Oxford, 1997), 119–21.

46. Ability at *tafl* is mentioned as one of the *íþróttir* (skills) of Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson in *Rv Lv 1* (ed. Judith Jesch, in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 2*, ed. Kari Ellen Gade, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2*, 2 vols. [Turnhout, 2009], 2:576–77).

47. Neckel and Kuhn, eds., *Edda*, 2.

48. On the symbolic significance of *hnefatafl*, see e.g. Dronke, *The Poetic Edda 2*, 119–21; A. G. van Hamel, “The Game of the Gods,” *ANF* 50 (1934): 218–42.

49. Jón Helgason, ed., *Heiðreks saga*, SUGNL 48 (Copenhagen, 1924), 82.

50. Davidson, “Insults and Riddles,” 31.

51. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, 17.

52. *Vafþrúðnismál* stanza 20; *Grímnismál* stanzas 40–41.

53. Peter Hallberg, “Elements of Imagery in the Poetic *Edda*,” in *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, ed. R. J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg, 1983), 47–85, at 52–53 (italics in the original).

54. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, 3.

55. See Burrows, “Enigma Variations.”

56. Taylor, “The Riddle,” 129.

57. On the relationship between riddles and kennings, see John Lindow, “Riddles, Kennings, and the Complexity of Skaldic Poetry,” *SS* 47 (1975): 311–27.

58. See further the editions of these riddles forthcoming in Clunies Ross, ed.,

Poetry in *fornaldarsögur*; and cf. Taylor, “The Riddle,” 130.

59. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, 40.

60. See Helmfrid, “Hnefatafl,” 10–11, for discussion of the various possibilities.

61. A similar concept is also used effectively in *Gylfaginning*’s account of the magical fetter Gleipnir, used to tie up the Fenrisúlfr until Ragnarøk, one of the ingredients of which, according to Snorri, is “anda fiskins” (breath of the fish; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, 42).

62. Neckel and Kuhn, eds., *Edda*, 62.

63. *Ibid.*, 53.

64. *Ibid.*, 19.

65. John Lindow, “Poetry, Dwarfs, and Gods: Understanding *Alvíssmál*,” in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout, 2007), 285–303, at 303, 299.

66. *Atlakviða* 2/2 (Neckel and Kuhn, eds., *Edda*, 240).

67. Jón Helgason, ed., *Heiðreks saga*, 82.

68. Tolkien, ed., *Heiðreks saga*, 33.

69. Jón Helgason, ed., *Heiðreks saga*, 58.

70. See Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles*, 243.

71. In this respect the riddles have much more in common with eddic poetry than, say, the Old English Exeter Book riddles, which by going without solutions in their manuscript context have tortured scholars for centuries.

72. Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson’s ars poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (Odense, 1987), 80; see also Elizabeth Jackson, “Some Contexts and Characteristics of Old Norse Ordering Lists,” *SBVS* 23 (1990–93): 111–40.

73. Jackson, “Some Contexts,” 111.

74. Neckel and Kuhn, eds., *Edda*, 66.

75. *Ibid.*, 48–49.

76. *Ibid.*, 65.

77. Tolkien, ed., *Heiðreks saga*, 35–36.

78. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Faulkes, 19.

79. My editions of these riddles will appear as Anon *Gát* 1–3 in *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, ed. Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 3 (Turnhout, forthcoming).

80. Lindow, “Poetry, Dwarfs, and Gods,” 295.

81. Þórr’s formulaic question, which has much in common with Óðinn’s in *Vafþrúðnismál*, includes the phrase “heimi hveriom í” each time (Neckel and Kuhn, eds., *Edda*, 125–29). *Alvíss* gives an example from a selection of the languages of each race in each stanza, but not from every language every time. See the helpful table in vol. 3 of *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, ed. Klaus von See et al., 8 vols. (Heidelberg, 1993–2012), 282–83.

82. On the pairing of the categories and apparent “omission” of day, see Heinz Klingenberg, “*Alvíssmál*: Das Lied vom überweisen Zwerg,” *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift* 48 (1967): 113–42.

83. Neckel and Kuhn, eds., *Edda*, 125–27.

84. For a discussion of the assumption that the sun petrifies dwarfs, see Paul Acker, “Dwarf-lore in *Alvíssmál*,” in *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York, 2002), 213–27, at 219–20.

85. Lennart Moberg, “The Languages of *Alvíssmál*,” *SBVS* 18 (1970–73): 299–393, at 308, 311.

86. Brittany Erin Schorn, “How Can His Word Be Trusted?: Speaker and Authority in Old Norse Wisdom Poetry,” unpublished PhD Diss., University of Cambridge,

87. Certain riddles, such as the dead snake riddle (25) or the Óðinn and Sleipnir riddle (36), cannot be said to be particularly insightful and seem to have a different function, perhaps primarily humorous, than those which provoke a new reading of an object.

88. See my edition forthcoming in Clunies Ross, ed., *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*.

89. A. J. Wyatt, ed., *Old English Riddles* (Boston, 1912), xxviii.

90. Donatus, *Ars grammatica*, in *Probi, Donati, Servii qui feruntur de arte grammatica libri*, ed. Heinrich Keil and Theodor Mommsen, *Grammatici Latini* 4 (Leipzig, 1864), 402.

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1. Carol Clover and John Lindow, eds., *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, *Islandica* 45 (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985; repr. with new preface, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, Toronto, 2005).

2. Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, *Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture* (Malden, Mass., 2005).

3. Lilja, ed. Martin Chase, in *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 7, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 2007), 2:544–677; *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok: Med mórugum andlegum Viisum og Kuædum Psalmum, Lof sǫnguum og Ríjnum* (Hólar, 1612, digital facsimile at http://baekur.is/en/bok/000594811/Ein_Ny_Wiisna_Bok. Print facsimile edition by Sigurður Nordal, *Bishop Guðbrand's Vísnaðók: Published in Facsimile with an Introduction in English*, *Monumenta Typographica Islandica* 5 [Copenhagen, 1937]; normalized spelling edition by Jón Torfason and Kristján Eiríksson, eds., *Vísnaðók Guðbrands* [Reykjavík, 2000]).

4. Roberta Frank, “Skaldic Poetry,” in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, ed. Clover and Lindow, 157–96.

5. Katrina Attwood, “Christian Poetry,” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. McTurk, 43–63.

6. Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. 4 vols. Vols. AI, AII, Tekst efter håndskrifterne; BI, BII, Rettet tekst (Copenhagen, 1912–1915).

7. Lilja, ed. Chase.

8. See Einar Sigurðsson, *Ljóðmæli*, ed. Jón Samsonarson and Kristján Eiríksson, *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar*, Rit 68 (Reykjavík, 2007).

9. See Daisy L. Neijmann, *A History of Icelandic Literature*, *Histories of Scandinavian Literature* 5 (Lincoln, Nebr., 2006), 178–84.

10. *Su Gamla Vijsna-Book: Epter hiñe Fyrre, aldeilis rett lögud, med enum sømu Vijsm, Kvædum, Psalmum, Lof-Saungvum og Ríjnum ...* (Hólar, 1748).

11. Jón Þorkellsson, *Om Digtningen på Island i det 15. og 16. Århundrede* (Copenhagen, 1888).

12. *Kvæðasafn eftir nafngreinda íslenzka menn frá miðöld* (Reykjavík, 1922–27). Jón Helgason’s detailed review sums up the strengths and (many) weaknesses of the edition: Jón Helgason, “Nokkur íslenzk miðaldakvæði,” *ANF* 40 (1924): 285–313.

13. The Appendix contains Jón Helgason’s plan for volume 3.

14. Jón Helgason, “Senmiddelalderens Digtning,” in *Norges og Islands Digtning, Litteratur-Historie B: Norge og Island*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, *Nordisk Kultur* 8 B (Stockholm, 1953), 160–79.

15. Stefán Einarsson, *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga 874–1960* (Reykjavík, 1961), 80–100; see also the abridged English version, *A History of Icelandic Literature*, (New York, 1957), 79–83.

16. Vésteinn Ólason, “Trúarkvæði,” in *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga* 2, ed. Böðvar

Gudmundsson, Sverrir Tómasson, and Torfi H. Tulinius, 2nd ed. (Reykjavík, 2006), 285–321.

17. Alexander Jóhannesson, *Íslensk tunga í fornöld* (Reykjavík, 1923–24), 26.

18. “Inholdsmæssigt har hele denne digtning kun ringe nationalt særpræg; den bygger på kirkens internationale skat af apostelvitaer, helgenbiografier og legender. Om Marias glæder og bedrøvelser digtede man også i andre lande, og jærtegnene er ikke digternes egne oplevelser, men hentede fra oversatte samlinger. Digteren støtter sig som regel til en opbyggelig bog, hvis indhold gengives på vers” (Jón Helgason, “Senmiddelalderens Digtning,” 164).

19. Frank, “Skaldic Poetry,” 180.

20. Reykjavík, AM 720 b 4to, 6v–8v.

21. Jón Helgason, *Íslensk miðaldavkæði*, 1.2:238–46.

22. Margrét Eggertsdóttir, “Eddulist og barokk í íslenskum kveðskap á 17. öld,” in *Guðamjöldur og Arnarleir: safn ritgerða um eddulist*, ed. Sverrir Tómasson (Reykjavík, 1996), 91–116.

23. Kristján Eiríksson, *Bragi: Óðfræðivefur*, <http://bragi.arnastofnun.is/>.

24. Guðrún Nordal, “Á Mörkum Tveggja Tíma: Kaþólskt kvæðahandrit med hendi siðbótarmanns, Gísla biskups Jónssonar,” *Gripla* 16 (2005): 209–28; Nordal, “Handrit, prentaðar bækur og pápísk kvæði á siðskiptaöld,” in *Til Heiðurs og Hugbótar: Greinar um Trúarkveðskap fyrri Alda*, ed. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir and Anna Guðmundsdóttir, Snorrastofa, Rit 1 (Reykholzt, 2003), 131–43.

25. Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum antiquae linguae septentrionalis* (Copenhagen, 1854); rev. ed. by Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1931).

26. Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*, Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde 1 (Bonn, 1921; repr., Hildesheim, 1984).

27. Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, Safn Fræðafjelagsins um Ísland og Íslendinga 9 (Copenhagen, 1934). See also Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Um Íslenskar Orðmyndir á 14. og 15. Öld og Breytingar þeirra úr Fornmálinu, með Viðauka um Nýjungar í Orðmyndum á 16. Öld og Síðar*, Rit um íslenska málfræði 2 (Reykjavík, 1925, repr., Reykjavík, 1987).

28. Finnur Jónsson, *Ordbog til de af Samfund til udg. af gml. nord. Litteratur udgivne Rímur samt til de af Dr. O. Jiriczek udgivne Bósarimur*, SUGNL 51 (Copenhagen, 1926–28).

29. Sigfús Blöndal, *Íslensk-Dönsk Orðabók*, 3 vols. (Reykjavík, 1920–24, 1963; repr., Reykjavík, 1980, 1981).

30. *Orðabók Háskólans*, <http://www.lexis.hi.is/indexny.html>.

31. Fritzner, <http://www.edd.uio.no/perl/search/search.cgi>.

32. ONP, <http://dataonp.hum.ku.dk/index.html>.

33. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, p. 141.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

35. See Hannes Pétursson, *Bókmenntir*, Alfræði Menningarsjóðs (Reykjavík, 1973), 59; and Vésteinn Ólason, ed., *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga 2*, 2nd ed. (Reykjavík, 2006), 285–321, at 302.

36. The others are:

“Ein ágæt minning” (Jón Torfason and Kristján Eiríksson, eds., *Vísnaþók Guðbrands*, 298–304).

Jón Hallsson, “Ellikvæði” (*Ibid.*, 437–39).

Niðurstigningarvísur (Jón Helgason, ed., *Íslensk Miðaldavkæði: Islandske Digte fra Senmiddelalderen*, 2 vols. [Copenhagen, 1936, 1938], 1.2:212–37).

Um kross og mótgang (Jón Torfason and Kristján Eiríksson, eds., *Vísnaþók Guðbrands*, 317–21).

- Þorvaldur Magnússon, “Veronikukvæði” (Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 93–94).
- “Vísur af Máriu Magdalene II,” (Jón Helgason, *Íslenzk Miðaldakvæði*, 2:389–401).
- Einar Sigurðsson í Eyðölum, “Ódult sé öllum stéttum” (Jón Samsonarson and Kristján Eiríksson, eds., *Einar Sigurðsson í Eyðölum: Ljóðmæli*, 114).
37. Björn K. Þórolfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 195.
38. See *ibid.*, 204–7.
39. Davíð Erlingsson, *Blómað Mál í Rímum*, Ritaskrá Steingríms J. Þorsteinssonar, ed. Einar Sigurðsson, *Íslenzk fræði* [Studia Islandica] 33 (Reykjavík, 1974), 9–33 and 38–40.
40. *Bósa Rímur*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, *Íslenzkar miðaldarímur* 3 (Reykjavík, 1974), 69.
41. Jón Helgason, ed., *Íslenzk Miðaldakvæði*, 2:53.
42. Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 95.
43. *Ármanns Rímur eftir Jón Guðmundsson Lærða og Ármanns Þáttur eftir Jón Þorláksson*, ed. Jón Helgason, *Íslenzk rit síðari alda* 1 (Copenhagen, 1948), 11.
44. Jón Helgason, ed., *Íslenzk Miðaldakvæði*, 2:374.
45. “... and yf that olde bokes were aweye, / Yloren were of remembraunce the keye.” Geoffrey Chaucer, *Prologue to The Legend of Good Women*, lines 25–26, ed. A. S. G. Edwards and M. C. E. Shaner, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, 1987), 589.
46. See Meissner, *Die Kenningar*, 134.
47. Jón Helgason, ed., *Íslenzk Miðaldakvæði*, 1:2:69.
48. *Skj* BI:188 [based on severe emendation of *Skj* AI:194].
49. *Skj* AII:342; BII:364.
50. Finnur Jónson, ed., *Rímnasafn: Samling af de ældste islandske rimer*, SUGNL 35, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1905–12), 1:300.
51. *Ibid.*, 1:442.
52. *Ibid.*, 1:309.
53. *Ibid.*, 1:306.
54. *Ibid.*, 1:62.
55. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London, 1998), 1:5. See also Mikael Males, “Skáldskaparmál as a Tool for Composition of Pseudonymous Skaldic Poetry,” in this volume.
56. Eilífr Guðrúnarson, “Et digt om Hakon jarl,” *Skj* BI:139.
57. Egill Skallagrímsson, *Berudrápa*, *Skj* BI:42.
58. *Vilmundar Rímur viðutan*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, *Íslenzkar miðaldarímur* 4, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 6 (Reykjavík, 1975), IV, 4, p. 63.
59. Russell A. Peck, ed., *The Pistel of Swete Susan*, in *Heroic Women from the Old Testament in Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo, 1991), 82. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/susanint.htm>.
60. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, p. 31 (fol. 16r).
61. *Lilja*, ed. Chase, 667–69.
62. Reykjavík, AM 714 4to, 28r.
63. Reykjavík, AM 710 g 4to, 23–35 (copied by Árni Magnússon), and Reykjavík, AM 716 a 4to, 1–4r.
64. AM 720 b 4to, 8v.
65. See e.g. Björn Þorsteinsson, *Enska Öldin í Sögu Íslendinga* (Holar, 1970).
66. Einar G. Pétursson, *Miðaldaævintýri þýdd úr ensku*, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 11 (Reykjavík, 1976).
67. Peter Jorgensen, “Ten Icelandic Exempla and Their Middle English Source,” *Opuscula* 4, BA 30, (Copenhagen, 1970): 177–207.

68. What follows is based on Jón Helgason, “Íslenzk miðaldakvæði” (working paper, Jón Helgason Archive, Arnarnagnæan Manuscript Collection, University of Copenhagen, box 3). It must be emphasized that these are preliminary notes that sketch a variety of possibilities and not a specific plan for the volume. The lists of manuscripts containing the texts does not presume to be complete. Nevertheless, this information represents an enormous amount of research not to be found elsewhere and is extremely useful as a starting point for further research.

69. Transcribed by Jón Hákonarson (1722) in Reykjavík, AM 717 d α 4to, 3r–4r; Reykjavík Lbs. 1750 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 104.

70. Reykjavík, AM 720 a III 4to, 1r–v; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; printed in Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 218–20; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 101. This poem or one of the two following was originally contained in Reykjavík, AM 622 4to and ascribed by Árni Magnússon to Gísli Jónsson (see Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnarnagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2:36).

71. Reykjavík, AM 714 4to, 24r–26r; Reykjavík, AM 720 b 4to, 9r–10v; Reykjavík, AM 1032 4to, 310–328; Reykjavík, JS 413 8vo; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; printed in Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 220–22; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 101. This poem or either the preceding or the following was originally contained in Reykjavík, AM 622 4to and ascribed by Árni Magnússon to Gísli Jónsson (see Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnarnagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2:36).

72. Reykjavík, AM 721 4to, 2v–4v; Reykjavík, AM 720 b 4to, 4r–6r; Reykjavík, AM 920 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 100. This poem or one of the two preceding was originally contained in Reykjavík, AM 622 4to and ascribed by Árni Magnússon to Gísli Jónsson (see Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnarnagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2:36).

73. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, 71r–73v; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; Reykjavík, JS 531 4to; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 97.

74. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, 17r–18r; Reykjavík, AM 1032 4to, 292–308; Reykjavík, JS 399 b 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; Reykjavík, AM 920 4to; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 97.

75. Reykjavík, AM 714 4to, 23v–24r; Reykjavík, AM 712 e 4to; Edinburgh, Advocates Library 21.8.10; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; printed in Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 273–77; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 98.

76. Printed in Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 223–24.

77. Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 269–73; Edinburgh, Adv. 21.8.10; Reykjavík, JS 413 8vo; Reykjavík, Lbs. 201 8vo; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 327–28.

78. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, papp. 23 8vo 59v–60r.

79. Reykjavík, AM 720 a III 4to, 1r; printed in Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 213–18; mentioned in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 106.

80. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, 14v–16v; Reykjavík, AM 1032 4to, 330–54; Reykjavík, AM 720 b 4to, 2r–3r; Reykjavík, AM 969 4to; Reykjavík, JS 492 8vo; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2783 4to; cf. “Kvölderindi” in Reykjavík, AM 104 8vo, 233 and 307, and Jón Jónsson’s “Kvöldvísur” in Reykjavík, AM 722 4to, 27–34; originally contained in Reykjavík, AM 622 4to (see Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnarnagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2:36); stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 99–100.

81. Reykjavík, AM 717 d α 4to, 2r–v; Reykjavík, Lbs. 1750 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; printed in Hans Brix, “Den Signede Dag,” *Edda* 3 (1915): 177–96; and Brix, *Vers fra gamle dage: studier i middelalderens digtekunst* (Copenhagen, 1918), 166–

68; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 64–65.

82. Reykjavík, AM 716 a 4to, 1–7; Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, 25r–v; Reykjavík, AM 710 g 4to, 22–35; Reykjavík, JS 581 4to, 16–27; Reykjavík, Lbs. 201 8vo, 213–19; Reykjavík, JS 399 4to; entire text printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 69–74.

83. Reykjavík, AM 622 4to, 21–22; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; printed in Marius Kristensson, *En Klosterbog fra middelalderens slutning*, SUGNL 54 (Copenhagen, 1933), 236–7.

84. London, BL Add. 11177, 52–54; Reykjavík, JS 126 fol.; Copenhagen, DFS 66, 311–46; Copenhagen, DFS 67, 237r–237v; Copenhagen, NKS 1141 fol., nr. 26; Reykjavík, JS 405 4to, nr. 26; Copenhagen, DFS 66, 323–34; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 186.

85. Reykjavík, Lbs. 1587 4to, 139–41; Reykjavík, JS 255 4to, 128–9; Reykjavík, JS 591 4to, pt. 2, pp. 75–77; Reykjavík, Lbs. 202 8vo, 42–44.

86. Reykjavík, AM 720 a IX 4to, 1r–2r; Reykjavík, AM 720 b 4to, 6v–8v; Reykjavík, JS 531 4to; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 105–6.

87. Reykjavík, AM 622 4to, 135–45; Reykjavík, AM 710 d 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 444 4to; Reykjavík, JS 399 a-b 4to (two transcriptions); Reykjavík, AM 714 4to, 6v–9r; Reykjavík, AM 1032 4to, 194–224; printed in [Jón Þorkelsson, ed.] *Kvæðasafn*, 370–85; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 317.

88. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, 27v–28v; Reykjavík, AM 714 4to, 9r–10r; Copenhagen, AM 243 f fol., 128 (stanzas 1–12); Reykjavík, AM 712 c 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; originally contained in Reykjavík, AM 622 4to (see Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2:36); printed in Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 206–7; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 103.

89. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, 93–96; Reykjavík, AM 712 a 4to; Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 23 4to, 36r–37r; Reykjavík, JS 540 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166; printed in Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 204–6; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 103.

90. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, 90–92; Reykjavík, AM 712 d 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to; stanzas 1 and 25 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 98.

91. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, 28v–29v; originally contained in Reykjavík, AM 622 4to (see Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2:36); printed in Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 202–4; and [Jón Þorkelsson, ed.] *Kvæðasafn*, 238–44; stanzas 1 and 3 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 103, 313–14.

92. Reykjavík, AM 714 4to, 28r–29v; Reykjavík, 413 8vo, 94–102; stanza 1 printed in Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 104.

93. Reykjavík, AM 603 4to, 83. Reykjavík, Lbs. 2166 4to.

94. Reykjavík, AM 713 4to, 48v–50r; Reykjavík, AM 236 4to, 61–79; Copenhagen, NKS 3321 4to; Reykjavík, JS 494 4to; printed in *Biskupa sögur*, ed. Jón Sigurðsson, et al., 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1858–78), 2:305–14.

95. Reykjavík, AM 622 4to, 93–95; Reykjavík, ÍB 633 8vo; printed in Guðbrandur Þorláksson, *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, 390–91.

96. Reykjavík, AM 603 4to, 81–2; Copenhagen, Rask 87 8vo, 112–16; printed in Eugen Kölbing, *Beiträge zur vergleichenden Geschichte der romantischen Poesie und Prosa des Mittelalters* (Breslau, 1876), 242–45; Guðbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, eds. *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* (Oxford, 1883), 2:383–84; Jón Þorkelsson, *Om Digtingen på Island*, 229–35.

97. Reykjavík, AM 723 a 4to, 70–73; Reykjavík, AM 166 a 8vo, 93r–96v; Oxford, Bor. 6 [20647], 56v.

98. This enormously popular poem exists in many versions, and despite two modern editions, the text has not been definitively established, so the number of stanzas belonging to the original poem is uncertain. Jón Þorkelsson includes ninety stanzas in his edition, Finnur Jónsson, just twenty-seven. The following list of manuscripts (as early as the fifteenth century and as late as the nineteenth) is representative but by no means complete: Reykjavík, Lbs. 288 4to, 21–30; Reykjavík, Lbs. 3717 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 421 8vo, 253–4; Reykjavík, AM 723 a 4to, 3v–9r; Reykjavík, AM 738 4to, 22v–27r; Reykjavík, AM 149 8vo, nr. 8; Reykjavík, AM 166 a 8vo, 85r–89r; Reykjavík, AM 166 b 8vo, 27r–31v; Reykjavík, AM 167, 8vo; Copenhagen, NKS 1891 4to, 159–75; Reykjavík, AM 441 12mo, 115–24; Copenhagen, NKS 1867 4to; Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 23 4to; Stockholm, papp. 50 4to; Uppsala, Universitetsbibliotek, R 683, 158r–175v; Uppsala, R 694; Uppsala, R 715; Uppsala, R 703. Editions: Jón Þorkelsson, “Háttalykill Loptis Guttormssonar hinn skemmri,” *Kvæðasafn eftir nafngreinda íslenska menn frá miðöld* (Reykjavík, 1922–27), 1,2:16–48; Finnur Jónsson, “Om Háttalykill, der tillægges Loptr Gutthormsson,” *ANF* 48 (1932): 285–322.

99. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 22 4to; Reykjavík, JS 531 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; Copenhagen, NKS 3288 4to; edited by Gustaf Cederschiöld, *ANF* 1 (1883): 62–80.

100. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 23 4to, 39r.

101. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 22 4to, 56v–57r; Reykjavík, JS 540 4to; Copenhagen, NKS 3288 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; edited by Kristian Kålund, “Íslandsk digtning omkring 1500,” *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Filologi* 18 (1910): 17–16, at 44–46.

102. Reykjavík, AM 186 II 8vo, 1r–2v.

103. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 23 4to, 56v–57v; Reykjavík, JS 540; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; Copenhagen, NKS 3288 4to; printed in “Fjögur kvæði frá ýmsum tímum,” *Andvari* 37 (1912): 136–52, at 136–42.

104. Reykjavík, AM 155 b 8vo (one leaf); Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; printed in *Íslenskar gátur, skemtánir, víkivakar og þulur*, ed. J. Árnason and Ó. Davíðsson, 4 vols. (Copenhagen, 1887–1903), 3:308–9.

105. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 22 4to, 90v; transcribed in Reykjavík, JS 540 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; and Copenhagen, NKS 3288 4to; printed in *Íslenskar gátur*, 3:253.

106. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 22 4to, 90v; transcribed in Reykjavík, JS 540 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; and Copenhagen, NKS 3288 4to; printed in *Íslenskar gátur*, 3:254.

107. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 22 4to, 58r–v; transcribed in Reykjavík, JS 540 4to and Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; printed in *Íslenskar gátur*, 3:165–67.

108. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 22 4to, 58v; transcribed in Reykjavík, JS 540 4to and Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; printed in *Íslenskar gátur*, 3:252–3.

109. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 6 4to, 128r; transcribed in Reykjavík, Lbs. 444 4to and Reykjavík, JS 407 4to; printed in *Herr Ivan Lejon-riddaren*, ed. J. W. Liffman and George Stephens, *Samlingar Utgifna af Svenska Fornskrift Sällskapet* 5 (Stockholm, 1849), CXXXVII–CXXXVIII.

110. Reykjavík, AM 622 4to, 2v–3r; printed in Kristensson, *En Klosterbog*, 211–12.

111. Stockholm, Kungliga biblioteket, perg. 22 4to, 6r–7r; Reykjavík, JS 540 4to; Reykjavík, Lbs. 2033 4to; Copenhagen, NKS 3288 4to; printed in Kr. Kålund, “Íslandsk digtning omkring 1500,” *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Filologi* 18 (1910): 37–46, at 40–44.

112. Reykjavík, AM 687 b 4to, 1r.

1. Francis James Child, ed. *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (London, 1883–98; repr., New York, 1957), Ballad 84A, 2:276–77.
2. Bob Dylan, *Live at the Gaslight*, Columbia Records, 2005.
3. Two Icelandic ballads, nos. 81 and 82, are considered heroic (TSB E66 and E4). Eleven Icelandic ballads are supernatural; five religious; sixty-three chivalric; and twelve comic. Bengt R. Jonsson, Svale Solheim, and Eva Danielson, eds., *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad: A Descriptive Catalogue*, Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Series B, Skrifter, 49 (Oslo, 1978).
4. See Jón Helgason, ed. *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinsson: AM 147 8vo*, Íslenzk rit síðari alda 2a–b (Reykjavík, 1960).
5. See Vésteinn Ólason, *The Traditional Ballads of Iceland: Historical Studies*, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 22, (Reykjavík, 1982), 82–89.
6. See R. G. Finch, ed. and trans., *Völsunga saga: The Saga of the Volsungs* (London, 1963), ch. 31.
7. My text for *Gunnars kvæði* is from Vésteinn Ólason, ed., *Sagnadansar*, Íslenzk rit 5 (Reykjavík, 1979), 278–9.
8. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ÍF 12 (Reykjavík, 1954), ch. 48, pp. 122–24.
9. *Ibid.*, ch. 77, pp. 186–91.
10. *Gunnars kvæði*, stanza 2.
11. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ch. 48, pp. 123–24.
12. *Ibid.*, ch. 48, p. 124 n. 1, variant reading from Reykjavík, AM 163 d, fol.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Jonas Rugmans samling av isländska talesätt*, ed. Gottfried Kallestenius, Skrifter utgivna av Kungliga Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Uppsala, 22:8 (Uppsala, 1927), 34 and 92. See Richard Harris, *Concordance to the Proverbs and Proverbial Materials in the Old Icelandic Sagas*. <http://www.usask.ca/english/icelanders/>.
15. Vésteinn Ólason states that the ballad “can hardly be older than 1600” and notes that it lacks “characteristic ballad formulas” (*The Traditional Ballads of Iceland*, 291). There is an online facsimile of AM 163 d fol. at <http://www.handrit.is>.
16. See Paul Acker, “Performing Gender in the Icelandic Ballads,” forthcoming in *New Norse Studies*, ed. Jeffrey Turco (Ithaca, N.Y.).
17. Eve Salisbury, ed., *How the Goode Man Taght Hys Sone*, in *The Trials and Joys of Marriage*, TEAMS Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, 2002), 233–46, at lines 105–8. <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/gmfrm.htm>.
18. In the arrangement of her first marriage, Hallgerðr was not consulted. She is profligate in her housekeeping and her husband slaps her. She urges her foster-father Þjóstólfr to avenge the dishonor and kill her husband (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ch. 11, pp. 33–35). For her second marriage, Hallgerðr is consulted and does not run the household, so things go better and she loves her husband. But she is slapped again (ch. 16, p. 48); she forbids Þjóstólfr to kill her husband but he does so anyway.
19. “Hon kvazk þann hest muna skyldu ok launa, ef hon mætti” (*Ibid.*, ch. 48, p. 124).
20. The question is far from decided; see Ingvil Brügger Budal, “The Genesis of *Strengleikar*: Scribes, Translators, and Place of Origin” in this volume.
21. Peter Jorgensen, ed. and trans., *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, in *Norse Romance 1: The Tristan Legend*, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke, Arthurian Archives 3 (Cambridge, 1999), 23–226, at 25. The Anglo-Norman poem is edited by Joseph Bedier, *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas*, 2 vols., Société des Anciens Textes Français 53 (Paris, 1902 and 1905).
22. *Tristrams kvæði A*, stanza 5, *Íslenzk fornkvæði*, no. 23. Versions A–D are edited

in *Íslenzk fornkvæði*, ed. Svend Grundtvig and Jón Sigurðsson, 2 vols. in 4 parts, Nordiske Oldskrifter 19, 24, 26, 33 (Copenhagen, 1854–1885), 1:186–207; and translated in Joyce Hill, ed., *The Tristan Legend* (Leeds, 1977), 29–38. Version A of *Tristrams kvæði* is edited by Jón Helgason in *Íslenzk Fornkvæði: Íslandske Folkeviser* 1, EA, Series B, 10 (Copenhagen, 1962), 137–23. A normalized version of this edition with a translation by Robert Cook is printed in Kalinke, *Norse Romance* 1, 227–39.

23. *Tristrams kvæði* A, ed. Grundtvig and Jón Sigurðsson, stanzas 16–17.

24. Bedier, ed., *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas*, line 2563, 1:394 (cf. line 2978, 1:410).

25. Jorgensen, ed., *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, ch. 99, pp. 218–19.

26. ONP, s.v. “blár.”

27. Child, Ballad 42, 1:371–89.

28. Child, Ballad 59, 2:33–48.

29. Child, Ballad 10, 1:118–41.

30. *Tristrams kvæði* A, ed. Grundtvig and Jón Sigurðsson, stanza 20.

31. Eilhart von Oberg, *Tristrant und Isalde*, ed. and trans. by Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok, WODAN: Greifswalder Beiträge zum Mittelalter 27, Serie 1, Texte des Mittelalters 7 (Greifswald, 1993), lines 9611–16, p. 275.

32. Eilhart von Oberg’s Tristant, trans. J.W. Thomas (Lincoln, Nebr., 1978), 154.

33. *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, ed. Jorgensen, ch. 99, in Kalinke, ed., *Norse Romance* 1. There is no comparable passage in the Icelandic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* (ibid.), see 288–89.

34. Cited in Vésteinn Ólason, *The Traditional Ballads of Iceland*, 219.

35. *Íslenzk fornkvæði* no. 17, stanza 22 (cf. Jón Helgason, ed., *Íslenzk Fornkvæði: Íslandske Folkeviser* 4, EA, Series B, 10 [Copenhagen, 1963], 259–267).

36. William Morris, *A Book of Verse* (unpublished manuscript, 1870; facsimile repr. London, 1982), 37–39.

37. *Tristrams kvæði* A, ed. Grundtvig and Jón Sigurðsson, stanza 32.

38. *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, ed. Jorgensen, ch. 101; cf. *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, ed. Kalinke, ch. 14.

39. Bedier, ed., *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas*, 1:416.

40. Eilhart von Oberg, *Tristrant und Isalde*, ed. and trans. Buschinger and Spiewok, lines 9736–47, p. 279.

41. Eilhart von Oberg’s Tristant, trans. J. W. Thomas (Lincoln, Nebr., 1978), 155.

42. Maureen F. Thomas, “The Briar and the Vine: Tristan Goes North,” *Arthurian Literature* 3 (1983): 53–90, at 75–77.

43. Merritt R. Blakeslee, “Mouvance and Revisionism in the Transmission of Thomas of Britain’s *Tristan*: The Episode of the Intertwining Trees,” *Arthurian Literature* 6 (1986): 124–56, at 150.

44. Child, Ballad 7, 1:88–105.

45. Child, Ballad 73, 2:179–99.

46. Child, Ballad 74, 2:199–203.

47. Child, Ballad 75, 2:204–13.

48. Child, Ballad 85, 2:279–80.

49. Child, Ballad 84, 2:279–29.

50. Agnete Loth, ed., *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, 5 vols., EA 20–24 (Copenhagen, 1962–5), 5:233–238.

STEINUNN FINNSDÓTTIR AND SNÆKÓNGS RÍMUR / SHAUN F. D. HUGHES

1. Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Manntal á Íslandi árið 1703*, ed. Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson (Reykjavík, 1924–1947), “Borgafjarðarsýsla” 51. The fullest account of the Steinunn’s life is that by Bjarni Vilhjálmsón in the introduction to his edition of Steinunn’s *rímur*: Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóngrs rímur*, ed. Bjarni

Vilhjálmsson, Rít Rímnafélagsins 3 (Reykjavík, 1950), x–xvi. See also: Páll Eggert Ólason, *Seytjándi öld: Höfuðþættir*, Saga Íslendinga 5 (Reykjavík, 1942), 271–72; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Skáldkonur fyrri aldar*, 2 vols. (Akureyri, 1961–1963; repr., Reykjavík, 1995), 2:23–36; Finnur Sigmundsson, ed. *Rímnatal* I–II, 2 vols. in 1, (Reykjavík, 1966), 2:135–36; Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, “‘Gunnlöð ekki gaf mér neitt af geymsludrykknum forðum ...’: Um Steinunn Finnsdóttir, Hyndlurímur og Snækóngrímur,” *Guðmjöður og Arnarleir: Safn ritgerðir um eddulist*, ed. Sverrir Tómasson (Reykjavík, 1996), 165–218, at 167–69.

2. Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóngr rímur*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, xvii.

3. Not to be confused with the eddic poem *Hyndluljóð*, with which the *sagnakvæði* *Hyndluljóð* has no relationship. *Hyndluljóð* is a poem in two versions in *ÍGSVÞ* (see [Note 4](#)). The first, in ninety-seven stanzas, is found in a small number of manuscripts. But the copy text is based on a copy of the version in Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn, JS 231 4to, “Þingeyrabók,” a collection of poems assembled ca. 1770–1800 and for the most part in a single hand, without reference to the other MSS (*ÍGSVÞ* 4:65–74). The second version is a fragment of fourteen stanzas found in Reykjavík, AM 153, VI 8vo, which breaks off after King Logi’s people leave (the unnamed) Hildur (*ÍGSVÞ* 4:75–76). This may be the version of the poem received by Árni from Þórdís Jónsdóttir í Bræðratunga and was the only one known to Konrad Maurer, cf. the stanza quoted in his *Isländische Volkssagen der Gegenwart* (Leipzig, 1860; repr., Rye Brook, N.Y., 2001), 317. His paraphrase of the narrative is based on Steinunn’s *Hyndlu rímur* (Maurer, 314–17). Jón Þorkelsson has only the briefest reference to the fragmentary version of *Hyndluljóð* (*Om Digtingen på Island i det 15. og 16. århundrede* [Copenhagen, 1888], 203), even though he was aware of the “Þingeyrabók” version.

4. Jón Árnason and Ólafur Davíðsson, eds., *Íslenzkar gátur, skemtanir, vikivakar og þulur*, 4 vols. (Copenhagen, 1887–1904. Repr. in 2 vols. [Reykjavík], 1964). Hereafter, *ÍGSVÞ*.

5. Finnur Sigmundsson, ed., *Rímnatal*, 2:190–93 assigns 147 *rímur* and *rímnaflokkar* to the seventeenth century (his total is 148, but Jón Bjarnason’s *Heilræðis ríma* is listed twice). A very rough and ready breakdown into the subject matter of the source narratives reveals the following:

Rímur based on riddarasögur: 49

Rímur based on the Bible: 26

Rímur based on original compositions (poems on contemporary events, amusing incidents, etc.): 16

Rímur based on fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda: 16

Rímur based on the Íslendingasögur etc.: 15

Rímur based on foreign chapbooks (various topics): 9

Rímur based on Greek and Roman texts: 5

Rímur based on exempla or exempla-like narratives: 3

Rímur based on saints lives (heilagramanna sögur): 3

Rímur based on Flavius Josephus: 1

Rímur based on Saxo Grammaticus: 1

Rímur based on Sæmundar Edda: 1

Rímur based on sagnakvæði: 2

6. Jürg Glauser classifies many of the late *riddarasögur* (to which one could add some of the late *fornaldar sögur*—the distinction is made on the basis of setting, not form and content) as *Märchensagas*, because they have more in common with the international folk-tale corpus than the medieval romance (Glauser, *Isländische*

Märchensagas: Studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 12 [Basel, 1983], 17–22, esp. 21–22). Marianne E. Kalinke points out the difficulty of maintaining the distinction between *riddarasögur* and *fornaldar sögur* even in the high Middle Ages (Kalinke, “Riddarasögur, Fornaldarsögur, and the Problem of Genre,” in *Les Sagas de Chevaliers (Riddarasögur): Acts de la Vie Conférence Internationale sur les saga*, ed. Régis Boyer, *Série Civilisations* 10 [Paris, 1985], 77–91, at 77–78).

7. For an introduction to the Icelandic *exempla* and a discussion of the fluctuating meanings of the Icelandic equivalents, *ævintýi* and *dæmisögur*, see Shaun F. D. Hughes, “The Icelandic *Exempla* as Arbiters of Gender Roles in Medieval Iceland,” *New Norse Studies*, ed. Jeffrey Turco, *Islandica* (Ithaca, N.Y., forthcoming).

8. A similar recognition of *Märchen* as essentially “women’s” texts (writing) lies behind their pejorative appellative, *kerlingasögur* (Stories by Old Women). *Kerling* is a very difficult word to translate, as it has a wide range of meanings from the (almost) neutral, descriptive “old woman,” or even “woman” as in *Stjórn’s* translation of Genesis 2:23: “þessi skal kerlingh heita. þiat hon er af karlmanninum komin” (*Stjorn: Gammelnorsk Bibelhistorie fra Verdens Skabelse til det Babyloniske Fangenskab*, ed. C. R. Unger [Oslo, 1862], 34; cf. *Guðbrandsbiblíá*: “þar fyrer skal hun Karlinna kallast / af þui hun er af Karlmanne tekin”), to the offhand description of a wife or girl friend as “the old lady” (itself involving a wide range of pejoration). Then there are the mountain passes with the name *Kerlingarskarð* (-cleft), two of them in the vicinity of a *Kerlingarfjöll*: *Kerlingarskarð* in *Álftaneshreppur* (Garðarsókn), *Gullbringusýsla*, on the western approach to Litla-Kóngsfell, and *Kerlingarskarð*, the haunted and dangerous winter pass on Snæfellsnes between Helgafellssveit and Miklaholtshreppur. The third is just south of Þiðriksvallavatn in Hrófbergshreppur, *Strandasýsla*. References to *Guðbrandsbiblíá* are to the edition: *Biblia. Þad er, Öll Heilög Ritning vtögd a Norrænu*, [ed. and trans. Guðbrandur biskup Þorláksson (Hólar, 1584)], 400 ára minningarútgáfan, ed. Bishop Sigurbjörn Einarsson et al. (Reykjavík, 1984).

9. See the discussion of provenance in *Móðars rímur og Móðars þáttur*, ed. Jón Helgason, *Íslensk rit síðari alda* 5 (Copenhagen, 1950), vi–ix; Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, “Gunnlöð ekki gaf mér neitt,” 172–73; Shaun F. D. Hughes, “The Re-emergence of Women’s Voices in Icelandic Literature, 1500–1800,” in *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. Sarah M. Anderson with Karen Swenson (New York, 2002), 93–128, at 120.

10. Jonna Louis-Jensen has argued that on the basis of the opening stanzas of the *mansöngur* to the ninth fitt in particular of *Landrésrímur* (assigned to the first half of the fifteenth century) that the poem must be by a woman (“Om Ólíf og Landrés, vers og prosa samt kvinder og poeter,” in *Eyvindarbók: Festskrift til Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen*, ed. Finn Hødnebo et al. [Oslo, 1992], 217–30, at 226–29).

11. In accordance with modern publishing conventions, all quotations from the *mansöngvar*, here prefaces to each individual *ríma* or fitt, will be given in italics in order to distinguish these parts of the poem from the narrative proper.

12. There will be some who will want to argue (as I do on almost every occasion), that the *mann-* in *mannvit* should be translated as “human,” but I think on this occasion the term is gender specific—unless one wants to suggest that Steinunn is saying that women lack human understanding, a position at odds with her stand in the fourth *mansöngur* to *Snækóns rímur*. The fact that similar statements might appear in the *mansöngvar* to *rímur* composed by men does not invalidate the present analysis, because Steinunn in addition to the obligatory *excusatio* seems to be well aware of her marginal position as a woman poet.

13. The conventions used to resolve the poetic diction are as follows. Alternative poetic names are indicated by an equal sign: “Hár = Óðin.” Angle brackets are used

to give the sense of mythological and legendary names: “Bil <goddess>.” Kennings are given in full within quotation marks and resolved in small capitals within square brackets: “bridge of rings” [WOMAN]. When there are a sequence of kennings, the first one is in single quotation marks and its resolution in small capitals with an angle bracket to indicate what is the final result: “ ‘horse of the currents’ of Frosti <dwarf>” [SHIP > POEM]. Here the “horse of the current” is a ship and the ship of the dwarf is the poetic mead or poetry.

14. In discussing the narratives of *Snækóns rímur* (and *Hyndlu rímur*), it goes without saying that the remarks also apply to “Snjáskvæði” and “Hyndluljóð” even when the two sets of poems do not agree on particular details, as it must be assumed that the versions of the *sagnakvæði* known to Steinunn were not completely identical to the ones presented in *ÍGSVP*.

15. “Erfitt er að henda reiður á því, hvorar rímurnar Steinunn hefur ort fyrir. Hyndlurímur virðast þó öllu viðvanings-legri, og hvergi vottar þar fyrir dýrleika í háttum eða rími, en það er sem hún færir meira í fang í Snækóns rímum.... Gætti þetta bent til þess, að hún hafi verið byrjandi í listinni, þegar hún orti Hyndlurímur, en fengið hins vegar nokkra þjálfun, er hún réðst í að yrkja Snækóns rímur” (Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, xxi).

16. The *mansöngur* was originally a “maid-song,” but by this time the term was applied to any introductory verses to a *ríma*, whether addressed to a woman and dealing with love or not (as in the case with all of Steinunn’s *mansöngvar*). See Shaun F. D. Hughes, “Rímur,” *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, 13 vols. (New York, 1982–1989), 10:401–7, at 405–06; and Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, “Um Steinunn Finnsdóttir,” 192–201. On the older meaning of *mansöngur*, see Jenny Jochens, “From Libel to Lament: Male Manifestations of Love in Old Norse,” in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Enfield Lock, 1992), 247–64, at 249–51 and *passim*.

17. Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, xiv–xvi; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Skáldkonur fyrri aldar* 2:28–32; Jón Þórðarson frá Borgarholti, *Arfleifð kynslóðanna: Nokkrir þættir íslenkrar bókmenntasögu fram til 1750* (Reykjavík, 1980), 301.

18. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series 36 (Princeton, 1953; 7th Printing with Epilogue, 1990; first published as *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern, 1948), 83–85, 411–12. Not much seems to be known about the nature and extent of rhetorical training in Iceland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it is worthwhile to note that Magnús Jónsson *prúði* translated Friedrich Riederer (fl. 1493), *Spiegel der waren Rhetoric vss M. Tulio C. vnd andern getütscht* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1493). Magnús’ autograph copy survives in Copenhagen, AM 702, 4to, and it is a work with which Bishop Brynjólfur appears to have been familiar. See Jón Þorkelsson, *Saga Magnúsar prúða* (Copenhagen, 1895), 97.

19. Björn K Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, *Safn Fræðifjelagsins um Ísland og íslendinga* 9 (Copenhagen, 1934), 197.

20. *Ferskeytt* is the most common and most important *rímur*-meter. It is a 4-line stanza, 7 syllables in lines 1 and 3, 6 syllables in lines 2 and 4, rhyming *abab* (*a* rhymes masculine, *b* rhymes feminine). In the classification system of Helgi Sigurðsson, *Safn til bragfræði íslenzkra rímna að fornu og nýju* (Reykjavík, 1891), 67–128, it is *bragaætt* (meter-family) 5 (the ranking is alphabetical) with 588 variants.

21. This (half-)kenning (i.e. a kenning lacking a referent) needs the addition of a word such as *Gunnlöð* to be complete, i.e. “the dregs of the cistern of Gunnlöð.” See the discussion in Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, “Gunnlöð ekki gaf mér neitt,” 183–84. Cf. *Hyndlu rímur* 1.1: “horna hver” (the hot spring of the [drinking-]horns [of Óðin] [MEAD > POETRY]), Björn K Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 101, 202. In Snorri

Sturluson, *Edda, Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London, 1998), prologue, 3–5—the narrative of how Óðin stole the Mead of Kvasir (i.e. obtained poetic inspiration)—Gunnlöð is the daughter of Suttungur. Suttungur was the nephew of Gilling, a giant, who had drowned on a trip with the dwarves Fjalar and Galar (the ones who had created the poetic mead by killing Kvasir and mixing his blood with honey in the cauldron Óðrerir and the basins Són and Boðn). In compensation for having caused the death of Gilling and killing his wife, the dwarves offered Suttungur the three containers of the mead. He accepted this recompense and brought the mead home to Hnitabjörg where he set Gunnlöð to guard it. Óðin, disguised as Bölverkur, attempts to steal the mead, and after a series of adventures he is able to seduce Gunnlöð and drain the cauldrons. As Uli Linke, “The Theft of Blood, and the Birth of Men: Cultural Constructions of Gender in Medieval Iceland,” in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Enfield Lock, 1992), 265–88, has demonstrated in her work on the cultural construction of gender in Old Norse, the male appropriation of the power to create poetry as outlined in the Myth of the Theft of the Poetic Mead has involved the creation of a Myth of Male Procreation, and entails the substitution of the production of knowledge for the production of offspring and the substitution of the mouth for the vagina as the birth canal (283–86): “The ‘natural’ female model, procreation through the body, is rejected as unsuitable for the purposes of male creativity. Instead, male procreation is defined in terms of mental labor: the generation of poetic insight, wisdom, and inspiration. The assertion that wisdom and knowledge originated with men rather than women is thus crucial to the cycle of Icelandic myths” (285). Therefore a woman poet is a double threat to a patriarchal social situation. She dislocates the “natural” division of labor and threatens the male monopoly over the power of knowledge. In *Hyndlurímur*, Steinunn seems reluctant to challenge this “natural” order, but by *Snækóns rímur* (cf. 4:4–5 quoted below) she is more confident in asserting the appropriateness of women’s mental creativity. However, it is unlikely that Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* as we know it was available to poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries although various versions of it must have been in circulation like that prepared by séra Magnús Ólafsson á Laufási (ca. 1573–1636) which served as the basis of the first printed version of the Prose Edda: *Edda Islandorum ... Islandice, Conscripta per Snorronem. Sturlæ Islandiæ*, ed. Peter Johannes Rensen (Copenhagen, 1665), reprinted in facsimile in Anthony Faulkes, *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*, vol. 2: *Edda Islandorum. Völuspá—Hávamál. P. H. Rensen’s Editions of 1665*, Stofnun Árnarmagnus-Sonar á Íslandi; Rit 14 (Reykjavík, 1977). Wherever it seems appropriate references to Snorri’s *Edda* will be cross-referenced to the sixteenth-century *Laufás-Edda*, Anthony Faulkes, *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*, Vol. 1: *Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar (Laufás Edda)*, Rit 13 (Reykjavík, 1979). There, the story of the poetic mead is found in chapters 60–62 (1:243–46 for the manuscript text; 2: X3v–Y3r in Rensen’s edition).

22. This type of *ferskeytt* stanza is *frumlyklað* (or *vellusneitt*) (rhyme in the first syllable of the first and third lines), *hálftrumhent* (rhyme in the third syllable of the first and third lines), and *siðtáskeytt* (the same rhyme in the third and fifth syllables of the second and fourth lines).

23. A dwarf’s name, also found in the forms Hljóðólfur and Hleiðólfur. See Faulkes, *Two Versions of Snorra Edda*, 1:263 (long text), 340 (short text); 2: page Eelv. Perhaps a corruption of Hlévangur (Steinunn Finnisdóttir, *Hyndlurímur og Snækóns rímur*, 137). See also the discussion in Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, “Gunnlöð ekki gaf mér neitt,” 178–79.

24. *Braghenda* is a three-line stanza, twelve syllables in line 1, eight syllables in lines 2 and 3, with three alliterating words in the first line (Helgi Sigurðsson, *Safn til bragfræði*, 48–64, *bragaett* 3 containing 156 variants in three classes). Steinunn

writes *bragħenda alsamrímuð*, rhyming *aaa* (feminine rhymes).

25. This half-kenning needs the addition of a word for Óðin to be complete, i.e. “the wine of the polished (drinking-)horns [of Óðin]” (Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 202).

26. The spellings of the names Óðin and Þór reflect the usage of Steinunn’s time, as opposed to the Old Norse forms Óðinn and Þórr used elsewhere in the volume.

27. “Minni” is the “memorial” or toast given at a funeral feast. As a liquid it qualifies as the head word of a kenning for poetry (Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 198).

28. Frosti is a dwarf’s name and poetry is the “ship of the dwarf (-ves)” because the dwarves used the Mead of Kvasir (poetry) as “transportation” to get them off the skerry where Suttungur had placed them to help them clear their minds in the negotiations over the compensation he was to receive for the death of his father. This metaphor would be more appropriate if the head word of the kenning was some kind of liquid rather than a ship.

29. This image is based on the figure of poetry as “cargo in the ship of the mind” found in the first stanza of Egill Skallagrímsson’s “Höfuðlausn.” See Russell Poole, “Variants and Variability in the Text of Egill’s *Höfuðlausn*,” in *The Politics of Editing Medieval Texts: Papers Given at the Twenty-Seventh Annual Conference on Editorial Problems University of Toronto 1–2 November, 1991*, ed. Roberta Frank (New York, 1993), 65–105, at 66:

~~hlóðendur áttu þátt kabla kofa í skír.~~ [MIND] with a portion of praise (i.e. I composed a poem of praise in my mind).

This is the text found in Wolfenbüttel 9.10.Aug., 4to. Later paper manuscripts change “míns” to “minnis” (of the mind) and editors have changed “míns” to “mun-” or “hug-” (both “mind”) without improving the meaning (Poole, “Variants and Variability,” 93–94).

30. The image of buildings decorated with inscriptions or *tituli* was widespread. See Arwed Arnulf, *Versus ad Picturas: Studien zur Titulusdichtung als Quellengattung der Kuntsgeschichte von der Antike bis zum Hochmittelalte* (Munich, 1977). The inscription Hrafn sees is reminiscent of Luke 14:13 which reads in *Guðbrandsbiblíá*: “Þa biod Fataekum Vøndum, Hølltum & blindum, & muntu sæll verða,” but is more inclusive as it also includes at the feast the rich and powerful who are pointedly excluded in Luke 14:12.

2.52

~~Þetta er siðningið þjóðar þess vilja þýja~~ conceal the interpretation of the letters: “They
~~því þeir koma þíni ástir þó skilja~~ stood, “who wish to accept wine and bread.
“vín og brauð sem þiggja vilja.

2.53

~~Þeir eru stóðir þar þann þrúðugur líd;~~ such must be at the banquet just like
~~þó þeir eru fúlsu slíkir~~
verða skulu herrum líkir.”

31. *Úrkast* is a four-line stanza, eight syllables in lines 1 and 3, four syllables in

lines 2 and 4, rhyming *abab* (a rhymes masculine, b rhymes feminine, Helgi Sigurðsson, *Safn til bragfræði*, 238–46, *bragaætt* 19 containing 84 varieties). Steinunn’s variant is said to be *úrkast skothent*, an older, less accurate name for what is now called *úrkast frumhent*, that is, with internal masculine rhyme (cc) in the third syllable of lines 1 and 3.

32. Cf. “ljóða smíði” (for “the making of the verses” [POEM]), *Hyndlu rímur* 3.5; “Frosta duggu smíð” (the building of the “dogger of Frosti <dwarf>” [POEM]); *Hyndlu rímur* 4.8 and the kenning “orða smíð” (“the building of words” [POETRY]). See Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 201.

33. *Rímur*-poets often went from farm to farm to provide entertainment during the evening work periods (*kvöldvakar*). They would have been rewarded with meals, a place to sleep, and perhaps a gift when they left. The stanza suggests that poets who displeased their audience could expect short shrift.

34. Examples are in *ÍGSVP* 4:335–360, a selection which includes Steinunn’s “Fram vill Dvalins ferjan ana” (4:359–60), a poem about a fox and a cock.

35. Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, xvi; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Skáldkonur fyrri aldar*, 2:30–32.

36. The excellence of the swan’s singing is found elsewhere in seventeenth-century poetry. For example, in the “Fugla útvegur” attributed to séra Gizur Jónsson að Stafafelli (d. ca. 1615) (*ÍGSVP* 4:338–40) there is the following stanza (4:340):

14

~~The swan is able to sing in tenor; he has taken the “tenor”; a merry note
satisfies the heart of the hearing” [EAR]; may one with a booming voice have the
best of glass-killed voices from the “nook of speech” [THROAT] delights the
heart of those of suffering, (i.e. those who have just endured the hardships of
winter) in the song, þjáða
listug röddin tals úr krá,...~~

It should be clear that the swan referred to in these stanzas is the Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), a winter visitor to the coastal regions of mainland Europe, and not the Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), a stranger to the North, but common in Great Britain and Western Europe. It is also likely that séra Gizur is using “tenor” and “bass” in this stanza in quite a different meaning than is the usual interpretation of these terms in English. Their Icelandic sense is explained by Ólafur Davíðsson in his description of the traditional method of the singing of *tvísöngur* (a unique Icelandic variety of part-song with origins ultimately in Gregorian chant) (*ÍGSVP* 2:255):

Venulegast hafa víst tveir súngríð [tvísaung], og svo var með tvísaung þann, sem eg hefi heyrt. Annar saung lagið sjálf (tenórinn), en hinn “fór upp” eða “saung bassan.”

Most usually indeed have two sung *tvísöngur*, and so it was with that *tvísöngur* which I have heard. One sang the tune itself (the “tenor”), and the other “went up” [i.e. took the part with the higher notes] or “sang bass.”

37. Literally, a discourse in the meter *samhenda*, that is, four-line stanzas, each of seven syllables rhyming *aaaa* (masculine rhymes) (Helgi Sigurðsson, *Safn til bragfræði*, 178–79, *bragaætt* 13 containing 124 varieties).

38. The translation of *kvenleg* as “feminine” (the adjectival form of “femininity”) follows the distinctions made by Toril Moi, who sees “ ‘feminism’ as a political position, ‘femaleness’ as a matter of biology, and ‘femininity’ as a set of culturally defined characteristics.” See Toril Moi, “Men against Patriarchy,” in *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, ed. Linda Kauffman (Oxford, 1989), 181–88,

39. “Hún [Steinnun] er kvenleg án þess að slaka á kröfunum. Hún játar fúslega, að svanurinn syngi betur en rjúpan og sama “rómlag” sé ekki hjá báðum. Hún á við, að karlar yrki betur en konur, en þau fari hvort sína leið. Þessi viðurkenning er ekki sprottin af hefðbundinni kurteisi rímnaskálda, heldur er lítillæti Steinnunar sprottið af vitneskju þess, sem veit takmörk sín og þorir að viðurkenna þau, og fyrir bragðið verður rómlag hennar sterkara” (Guðrún Helgadóttir, *Skáldkonur fyrri aldar*, 2:31). See also Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, “Gunnlöð ekki gaf mér neitt,” 204–05.

40. Cf. *Hyndlu rímur* 1.4, 3.7, 4.20.

41. On stepmother stories see Hughes, “Re-emergence,” 101, and footnotes 55–57, 120; and Werner Lincke, *Das Stiefmuttermotiv im Märchen der germanischen Völker*, Germanische Studien 142 (Berlin, 1933); Birgit Hertzberg Johnsen, *Myten on den onde stemor: Fra folkstradisjon til massenlitteratur* (Oslo, 1982); Torborg Lundell, *Fairy Tale Mothers*, American University Studies 1: Germanic Languages and Literatures 82 (New York, 1990), 93–111, 246–47; Jacqueline Schectman, *The Stepmother in Fairy Tales: Bereavement and the Feminine Shadow* (Boston, 1993); Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “Stjúpur í vondu skapi,” *Tímarit máls og menningar* 53 (1995): 26–36; Christina Wamberg, *Den onde stedmor: Myte eller Virkelighed* (Frederiksberg, 1996); Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “Stjúpur og álagaminnið,” *Úlfhams saga*, ed. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 53 (Reykjavík, 2001), clxvii–clxxxi.

42. The *álag* (plural *álög*) is a form of obligation, a social phenomenon known in Irish as *geasa* or *geis*. John Revell Reinhard, *The Survival of Geis in Medieval Romance* (Halle, 1933), 2–21, discusses the etymology and origin of the *geis*. The use of the term to mean “enchantment” seems to be a literary innovation of the Middle Ages and to have entered English and French literature via the Romance—where it sometimes still has its older meaning of “obligation”; see David Greene, “Tabu in early Irish narrative,” in *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*, ed. Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al. (Odense, 1979), 9–19. In Old Norse literature, one of the best known examples of the *geasa* or *álag* is Glámur’s “curse” on Grettir in chapter 35 of *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (*Grettis Saga Ásmundarsonar; Bandamanna Saga; Odds Þáttir Ófeigssonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, ÍF 7 [Reykjavík, 1936], 118–23). The phenomenon in Icelandic and its likely Celtic origins is discussed in Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (Princeton, 1934; repr. New York, 1973), 125–36; P. C. M. Sluijter, *Ijslands Volksgeloof*, Nederlandsche Bijdragen op het Gebied van germaansche Philologie en Linguistiek 7 (Haarlem, 1936), 148–51; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, “Celtic Elements in Icelandic Tradition,” *Béaloideas* 25 (1959 for 1957): 3–24; Löng er för: *þrír þættir um úrskar og íslenzkar sour og kvæði*, Íslensk Fræði/Studia Islandica 34 (Reykjavík, 1975), 73–83; Rosemary Power, “*Geasa* and *Álög*: Magic Formulae and Perilous Quests in Gaelic and Norse,” *Scottish Studies* 28 (1987): 69–89; Gísli Sigurðsson, *Gaelic Influence in Iceland: Historical and Literary Contacts: A Survey of Research*, 2nd ed., Íslensk Fræði/Studia Islandica 46 (Reykjavík, 2000), 67–70. For a collection of stories that deal with *álög* in the modern Icelandic folk tradition see Árni Óla, *Álög og bannhelgi* (Reykjavík, 1968).

43. To call poetry “the ship of Óðin” is incorrect in terms of the permitted kennings in *Snorra Edda*, but it is permitted in the *rímur* and is itself an old error, as it is found in *Skálda hin minni* (Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 89–90, 195).

44. “Svell greipar” (icicle of the hand) was originally a kenning for silver, but as with similar kennings it began to be used for gold instead (Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 156–57).

45. On the practice of using verse runes to conceal the name of the *rímur* poet, see Israel Gollancz, *Hamlet in Iceland: Being the Romantic Ambales saga Edited and Translated, with Extracts from Five Ambales rímur* (New York, 1974; first published as

The Northern Library 3, London, 1898), lxxxi–ii, lxxxix, 284; Páll Eggert Ólason, “Fólgin nöfn í rímum,” *Skírnir* 89 (1915): 118–32; Hughes, “Rímur,” 404. The names of the runes are found in a number of rune poems both in Old English and Old Norse. Because of changes in Icelandic phonology, vowels such as *é* developed which did not have runic equivalents. This was taken care of by admitting a *stunginn* (dotted, literally “stabbed”) variety of a vowel or consonant: e.g. *stunginn í* = “dotted” *i*, = *é*, long spelt in the manuscript tradition as “*ie*” or “*je*”; *stunginn kaun* = “dotted *k*” = *g*.

46. This figure is not clear (Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snæköngs rímur*, 160). I think the idea is that ice is a covering over water which is not to be relied upon because it can be fractured or pierced, i.e. *stunginn*.

47. Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 2003), 141–42.

48. This appears to have been a loan word from Old English, rarely encountered in the meaning “fox,” more often with the meaning “fraud” (from the supposed cunning of the fox). However, it came to be applied to shrewish women. At this point in *Snjáskvæði*, the stepmother is called a *frískati* which I interpret as *fress* (lit. “tomcat,” but pejoratively applied to women, cf. the *ðlag* placed by Signý on Hildur in *Hyndlu rímur* 4.22f). In 4.75, Ólöf will refer to her stepmother as a *hryssa* (mare) a term which Signý uses twice to refer to Hildur (*Hyndlu rímur* 3.95 and 103).

49. It is not absolutely clear here that *flagð* must necessarily mean “female monster,” and it may just be a term of abuse like the animal terms discussed in the previous footnote. But to insist on the literal meaning is consistent with the depiction of the stepmother in *Hyndlu rímur*, and we also need to consider the fact that all this takes place not in the world of humans, but in the world of the Elves.

50. While it is true that on appointed occasions the human being is able, chrysalis-like, to emerge from the *hamur*, unless the shaping is destroyed, the individual must return to it. There is always some residue of human nature evident in the creature to those who pay sufficient attention to it, as in *Hyndlu rímur* when the old man and the old woman take note that the dog weeps (4.56; 5.27). Ólöf will become a man, Snær. Hrafn will attempt to deflect his attraction to him by accusing Snær before the retinue of being a woman (to whom he is also attracted as the poem subsequently demonstrates). For a discussion of the meaning of *hamur* and an introduction to shape-shifting in Old Norse see Sluijter, *Volksgeloof*, 118, 126–33 (*Hyndluljóð* 132); H. R. Ellis Davidson, “Shape-changing in the Old Norse Sagas,” *Animals in Folklore*, ed. J. R. Porter and W. M. S. Russell, The Folklore Society: Mistletoe Series (Cambridge, 1978), 127–42, 258–59.

51. In *Snjáskvæði*, when Hrafn follows King Snjár to the Land of the Elves, it is clear that Snjár becomes a woman again by the very act of returning to her home: However, in stanza 50, the princess tells Hrafn that she had to abandon her *kvenglys* (women’s finery) and dress in armor, while in stanza 51 she says she has been on Háleygjar for nine years and “að mitt eðlið / enginn vissi” (that no one knew my “nature”). But *eðli* can also mean “condition” and “origin” and may just as equally refer to her being under an *ðlag* or to her not being of this world but from Álfheimur. The same ambiguity applies in stanza 53 when she says that thanks to Hrafn: “Nú er eg aptur komin / að eðli mínu” (Now have I returned back to my “nature”). The text therefore supports, or rather does not contradict, a reading which interprets the *ðlag* as involving a physiological assumption of maleness. This is very different from the various *riddarasögur* involving *meyköngar* (maiden-kings) where the Princess behaves as a man (i.e. assumes male gender roles and behavior) while remaining a biological female. These stories usually end with the *meyköngur* “tamed” and married off, frequently to the social and economic advantage of the successful suitor (see Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*,

Islandica 46 [Ithaca, N.Y., 1990], 83). “Order” is imposed with the restoration of the gender roles that sustain a patriarchal society. See Eric Wahlgren, *The Maiden King in Iceland* (Chicago, 1938), and Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest*, esp. chapter 3, “The Misogamous Maiden Kings,” 66–108.

52. It would also be possible to translate *flýtirs snið* as “the shape of a man” taking *flýtir* (a hurrier) as a *heiti* for man (Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 179), and thereby indicating that Snær was a woman in the disguise of a man all along. But this interpretation has to be rejected because up until now there has been no indication that Snær’s gender is an issue (he is a man, so why would he pretend to be a man). However, since his time in Álfheimur will be shown to be limited, he is in a hurry and does not have time to stop and greet his well-wishers. Until 2.59 the poet refers to Snær as *hann*, *lofðung*, *kóngur*, *sjóli*, but in that stanza he has entered into the city and it is at that point that we hear of the crowd’s greeting “him” as a woman (2.59). Outside the city the *álag* is in effect, inside the city Snær is restored to her proper form and from this point on (to the end of the fitt) the references change to kennings for woman: *hringja þilja*, *skrúða vefja*, *kögra eik*, and a *heiti* for woman, *drós*. In the next fitt, so long as Snær is in the city, the reference to him/her are always as a woman (3.8–43). Afterwards, back on Háleygjá, there is no reference to King Snær that suggests that he is anything but a male.

53. In Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál*, prologue, 3, it is said that the sons of the giant Ölvaldi after his death divided up his gold by each taking a mouthful: “En þat höfum vér orðtak nú með oss að kalla gullið munntal þessara jötna” (And that we have as an expression now with us, to call gold the ‘mouth-speech’ of these giants) (text slightly modernized).

54. I have assumed here that the syntax of the two clauses is parallel: “queen *verb* king.” In the Icelandic language, gender is taught as a grammatical, not as a natural category. The word for warrior, *hetja*, is a feminine noun even though it usually refers to male individual. However, I think in this situation as earlier in the *mansöngur* to this same *rímur* (2.4), Steinunn subverts the “grammatical neutrality” by insisting at this point that not only is *hetja* a feminine noun, but that its referent also has to be understood as feminine one rather than the expected masculine one.

55. Cf. Heinz Dehmer, *Primitives Erzählungsgut in den Íslendinga-Sögur*, Von deutscher Poeterey 2 (Leipzig, 1927), 101, 136.

56. The potential for massive social disorder in a society where gender reassignment need depend on no more than a casual statement, while gender restoration might require widespread murder and destruction of property, underlies the strong prohibition in the surviving Norse law codes of the utterance of such accusations. The *locus classicus* of such a situation is found in chapter 123 of *Njáls saga*. A triple compensation (*wergild*) has been adjudicated against the murderers of Höskuldur Þráinsson Hvítanessgoði. When the money has been assembled, Njáll adds as a bonus a silken garment (a valuable and rare item of formal attire appropriate for either a man or a woman). Njáll then leaves. Flosi Þórðarson comes in to claim the payment and asks who gave the silken garment. No one answers. Flosi taunts the assembled group and says that it must have been given by the beardless Njáll: “því at margir vitu eigi ... hvárt hann er karlmaður eða konu” (because many do not know ... whether he is a man or a woman). Skarpheðinn Njálsson, after defending Njáll on the grounds that he has fathered sons on his wife, snatches back the silken garment and throws a pair of dark-blue trousers (assumed to be a woman’s garment) on the pile of money, telling Flosi he needs them the more. When Flosi asks why, Skarpheðinn replies: “þú ert brúðr Svínfellsáss ... hverja níunda nótt og geri hann þik að konu” (you are the bride of the Creature at Svínfell ... every ninth night and he uses you as a woman). The rest of the saga is devoted to the terrible retaliation that will be taken for this insult (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar

Ól. Sveinsson, ÍF 12 [Reykjavík, 1954], 314).

57. There might be some justification for translating *maður* here as “man” (a word which is gender specific in English despite protests to the contrary that it means “human being”). But even if that is the case, it means a hierarchically ordered humanity with women in a secondary and subservient position. However, to translate *maður* as the gender-neutral “person” plays into the atmosphere of gender ambiguity which has been building up in the narrative. If it had been important to emphasize gender in the question, *karlmaður* was always available—note that the complementary term is *kona*, the modern expression *kvennmaður* being known in the Middle Ages, but almost never used.

58. In *Snjáskvæði*, this stanza is applied to Hrafn by the king’s retainers as they are attempting to persuade him to leave before the first day of summer. Even though the reference to *dulkofri* in *Snjáskvæði* seems to be to a metaphorical garment of stupidity, it seems to me Steinunn has more in mind an garment of concealment like the *hamur*: she draws upon the image of the “hulin-hjálmur” (helmet of invisibility) found in Old Norse (cf. the *Tarnkappe* in *Nibelungenlied* 97.3). Such an object was greatly desired by those interested in latter-day magic, and there is a charm for obtaining one the surviving Icelandic manual of magic (*galdrabók*). See Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson, *Galdrar á Íslandi: Íslensk galdrabók* (Reykjavík, 1992), chapter 47, text and commentary, 443–46, 466.

59. Since *Rínar bál* “the pyre of the Rhine” (as, for example, *Snækóns rímur* 4.18) was a traditional kenning for gold, it became possible to substitute the names of any other European river, such as the Thames, as the referent (Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, 112, 160–61).

60. See the numerous examples, Celtic and others, discussed in Reinhard, *Survival of Geis*, 218–299.

61. Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2006), 38.

62. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1978. New York, 1990), 15ff.

63. See Hallgrímur Jónsson frá Ljárskógum, *Hver einn bær á sína sögu*, 2 vols. (Akranes, 1982–1983), “Ljárskógaætt. Ljárskógamenn,” 1:173–76; Einar Bjarnason, *Lögréttumannatal*, Sögurit 26 (Reykjavík, 1952–1955), 28–29, 147; Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, ed. Jón Pétursson and Hannes Þorsteinsson, 5 vols. (Reykjavík, 1881–1932), 3 (1905–1908): 310–14; “Finns Ætt” in Jón Halldórsson, *Ættartölubók*, 2 vols., Íslenskt ættfræðisafn (Reykjavík, 1983) 1:1–243 (these volumes contain a facsimile of Lbs. 2636, 4to, copied 1795 by Ásgrímur Vigfússon from Laugarbrekka from Jón Halldórsson’s own original while it was still complete). Jón Halldórsson has the following comment on Steinunn (1:13): “Steinun Finsd[óttir] ólst nokkra stund upp í Schálholtti uppá stadar vísu í Tíd M. Brinjuþs Sveins sonar, var kát og skáldmælt, giftist Þorbirni Eirekss[yni] bóndakorni i Hrunaman[n]a hrepp” (Steinunn Finsdóttir. spent part of her youth in service at Skálholt in the time of Brynjólfur Sveinsson. She was good humored and poetically talented. Married Þorbjörn Eiríksson, a small farmer from Hrunamannahreppur). On this passage see Steinunn Finsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, xii and Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, “Gunnlöð ekki gaf mér neitt,” 168. Ólafur Snókdalín, *Ættatölubók*, 3 vols. (containing facsimiles of Lbs. 451–453 fol. written 1834–1837) (Reykjavík, 1985), 1:81, merely says: “Steinun skald f[æddist] á[rið] 1640 átti þorbjörn Eiríkson (einarss[o]n) i byrtingaholt” (Steinnun the poet born in the year 1640, married Þorbjörn Eiríksson (Einarsson) from Biringaholt).

64. Einar Bjarnason, *Lögréttumannatal*, 28–29; Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, 3:314–20.

65. Einar Bjarnason, *Lögréttumannatal*, 495–96 (under Steinþór); Bogi

Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, 2:350–365 (there called Steindór). Modern authorities seem to prefer the form Steinþór. See *Ættartölusafnir séra Þórðar Jónssonar í Hítardal*, ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 2 vols., Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit 70 (Reykjavík, 2008), 2:237.

66. Einar Bjarnason, *Lögrettumannatal*, 148.

67. Jón *rebbi*'s father Sigurður *refur* or *rebbi* from Búðardalur was the son of Oddur *leppur* Þórðarson *lögmaður sunnan og austan* 1405–1422 (d. 1443).

68. Margrét was the daughter of Eiríkur Guðmundsson í Ásgarði Andréssonar að Felli Guðmundssonar. Andrés Guðmundsson (Arasonar *ríka*) married Þorbjörg, only child of Ólafur *tóni yngri* Geirmundsson, whose wife, Guðrún, was the only child of Ólafur *tóni eldri* Þorleifsson (d. 1393) Svartsonar frá Hvoli í Saurbæ. Margrét's mother was Guðrún Gunnlaugsdóttir, Eiríkur's second wife (Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir* 2:645). She was the granddaughter of Teitur Gunnlaugsson *ríki* í Bjarnanesi (Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, 4 [1909–1915]: 571–75).

69. Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, 2:353. Halldóra was the daughter of séra Einar Þórðarson á Melum. Her mother, Guðrún, was the daughter of Marteinn Einarsson (d. 1576), bishop of Skálholt, and the bitter opponent of Jón *biskup* Arason. Bishop Marteinn, too, was well known for his poetic skills. His father, Einar Snorrason (d. ca. 1538), had also been an accomplished poet and was known as *Ölduhryggjaskáld*, although none of his work seems to have survived (Jón Þorkelsson, *Digtningin*, 314–15).

70. The second son was Finnur *yngri*, *lögrettumaður* (ca. 1620–ca. 1686) (Einar Bjarnason, *Lögrettumannatal*, 146).

71. H[annes]. Þ[orsteinsson]., “Vísur séra Jóns gamla á Staðarhrauni m[eð]. fl[eiri].,” *Blanda: Fróðleikur gamall og nýr*, 9 vols., Sögurit 17 (Reykjavík, 1918–1952), 3 (1924–1927): 378–80 at 379–80 rejects the claim of séra Jón Halldórsson (see Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, 4:9 n. 3) that Jón *gamli* lived until he was 113, pointing to evidence suggesting he was somewhere in the vicinity of 101–103 when he died in 1653 (379).

72. Staðahrauns-Jón is the author of the *Rímur af Jómsvíkingum* (9 að tölu, unpublished) (Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 1:291).

73. Einar Bjarnason, *Lögrettumannatal*, 147–48.

74. Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, 2: 667–68.

75. Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 1:515.

76. Printed [with other material]: Copenhagen, 1772; Hrappsey, 1783; Copenhagen, 1832; Reykjavík, 1960; printed separately: Reykjavík, 1884, 1905. See Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 1:467.

77. Eyjólfur *mókollur eldri* Magnússon (born ca. 1398– d. after 1471) was the father of Eyjólfur *yngri*'s mother, Ingibjörg (Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, 2:13). He seems to have been the son of Magnús Grímsson (ca. 1375–ca. 1417) whose first wife was the sister of Eyjólfur *mókollur* Halldórsson í Haukadal í Dýrafirði (d. ca. 1396). See Steinn Dofri, “Rannsóknir eldri ætta til skýringa ýmissa óljósra atriða í miðaldasögu Íslendinga,” *Blanda* 7 (1940–1943): 193–236, at 206. In 1434 Eyjólfur married Helga, the sister of the poet Svartur Þórðarson, now considered to be the author of the fifteenth-century “Skaufalabálkur” once attributed to Einar *fóstri* (Steinn Dofri 195–96).

78. *Lögrettumannatal*, 139–40, 153–54. Þórdís married Halldór Ormsson í Saurbæ. Their daughter. Valgerður married séra Jón Egilsson í Stafholti (d. 1619), and their daughter Þórdís was Steinunn's grandmother. Valgerður's brother Eyjólfur was married to Solveig, sister of Halldóra, wife of Guðbrandur Þorláksson, bishop of Hólar, two of the seven [legitimate] daughters of Árni *sýslumaður* Gíslason að Hlíðarendi (d.1587), each of whom made important marriages, Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir siðskiptaaldarinnar á Íslandi*, 4 vols. (Reykjavík, 1919–1926), 3:496.

79. The chronicles are silent about this affair possibly out of respect for Kristín, the wife of séra Gísli Jónsson (ca. 1515–1587), who became the third Protestant bishop of Skálholt in 1556. But the story must have circulated orally. There is a brief mention of the affair in the “Biskupa-annálar Jóns Egilssonar,” *Safn til sögu Ísland og íslenzkra bókmennta* 1 (1856): 15–136, at 125, 133–34. (Jón Egilsson [1548–ca.1636] completed his chronicle in 1605). This is repeated in the *Ættartölusafnrit* of séra Þórðar Jónssonar í Hítardal, 65–66, see also 112–13, 350–51, and in the work of Jón prófastur Halldórsson í Hítardal, *Bikupasögur*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson, 2 vols. Sögurit 2 (Reykjavík, 1903–1915), 116–19. See also Jón sýslumaður Espólín, *Íslands Árbækur í sögu-formi*, 12 parts plus Index (Copenhagen, 1821–1855; repr., Reykjavík, 1946), “Þridji Þáttur,” chapter 76, Part 3 [1824]: 104–05; Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir* 2 (1922): 219–21; Már Jónsson, *Blóðsköm á Íslandi, 1270–1870* (Reykjavík, 1993), 56–57.

80. Steinn Dofri states that Eyjólfur *mócollur eldri* Magnússon had a son Ögmundur whose daughter Margrét married Páll Guðmundsson, the parents of bishop Ögmundur (205). But see the caution in Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, 3:594.

81. Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannaæfir*, 2:531 says that Þórdís’ child with her brother was séra Jón Gíslason from Holt undir Eyjafjöllum but this does not seem to be right. It is more likely that the child died as an infant.

82. Guðrún, Kristín’s child with her brother, survived and married. Guðrún’s granddaughter married Pétur Einarsson, *lögréttumaður* from Ballará í Dölum (1597–1666), the author of *Eintal Salarennar vid sialfa sig* (Hólar, 1661) (*Lögréttumannatal*, 440–41). Among his other poetic accomplishments was the writing of *rímur* 14–30 to complete the large *rímnaflökkur* of *Pontus and Sidonia* (30 að tölu), begun by Magnús Jónsson *prúði* (ca. 1525–91) (*rímur* 1–13) and séra Ólafur Halldórsson að Stað í Steingrímsfirði (ca. 1570–1614) (*rímur* 14–15, alternative versions) (See *Pontus rímur*, ed. Grímur Helgason, Rit Rímnafélagsins 10 [Reykjavík, 1961]); Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 1:386–87). Pétur is also the author of the first 8 *rímur* of *Hrólfs rímur Gautrekssonar* (18 að tölu, unpublished) completed by séra Eiríkur Hallsson í Höfða (1614–1698), himself the author in whole or in part of fifteen surviving *rímnaflök* in addition to maybe as many as eleven others now lost (see Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 1:259–60; 2:37–38).

83. Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir*, 2:220.

84. Nevertheless, the very powerful were still able to manipulate the law to their own advantage, as in the case of Björn sýslumaður í Bæ á Rauðasandi Magnússon Jónsonar *prúða*, who had two children with his sister Sesselja in 1603 and 1604, but got himself acquitted on a technicality at the Alþing in 1605 by successfully presenting a *tylftaeiður* (an oath witnessed by twelve people, see further Páll Sigurðsson, *Þróun og þýðing eiðs og heitvinningar í réttarfari* [Reykjavík, 1978], 101–08) to substantiate his claim of innocence. He subsequently married, first (1609) Sigríður Daðadóttir að Skarði á Skarðsströnd, and then (1617) the eighteen-year-old Helga, daughter of Arngrímur lærði and Solveig *kvennablómi*. One of the children of this latter marriage was séra Páll í Selárdal, who sparked off one of the worst outbreaks of witchcraft persecution in Iceland, which resulted in 9 individuals being burnt at Selárdalur between 1669 and 1678 (Ólafur Davíðsson, *Galdur og galdramál á Íslandi*, Sögurit 20 [Reykjavík, 1940–1943], 80–81 and *passim*). Sesselja married Ísleifur the son of Eyjólfur Halldórsson Ormssonar í Saurbæ and Solveig daughter of Árni sýslumaður Gíslason, and was therefore related by marriage to Steinunn through her grandmother, Þórdís Jónsdóttir, whose mother, Valgerður, Eyjólfur’s sister, was Ísleifur’s aunt.

85. Kirsten Hastrup, “Urchronia and the Two Histories of Iceland, 1400–1800,” *Other Histories*, ed. Kirsten Hastrup (London, 1992), 102–20, at 106.

86. Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, xvii.

87. Bogi Benediktsson, *Sýslumannæfir*, 2:353; Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, xi–xii. Guðríður's mother was Sigríður Styrsdóttir, the sister of Guðný who married Torfi Þorsteinsson frá Höfn, the brother of Björn who was to become the husband of Steinunn Finnsdóttir's daughter, Guðrún. With respect to Steinunn's half-siblings, in Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín, *Manntal 1703*, Sigríður, 45 years and married to Þorleifur Sigmundsson, is living on part of Kúludalsá in Borgarfjarðarsýsla (47) and Jón, 44 years old, married to Þorleifur's sister, Guðlaug, is farmer at Brúarfoss in Mýrasýsla (81).

88. Immediately upon the arrival the new *guvernör* (*landstjóri*, i.e. *hirðstjóri*), Henrik Bjelke (1615–1683), at Bessastaðir, Brynjólfur was urging him to do something to help combat leprosy, which had reached endemic proportions. See Sæmundur Bjarnhéðinsson, “Ágrip af sögu holdsveikinnar á Íslandi,” *Skírnir* 84 (1910): 48–65, 141–51, 229–49, at 54; “The Leprosy in Iceland,” *Lepra: Bibliotheca internationalis* 8 (1909): 367–401, at 372 (also *II Internationale Wissenschaftliche Lepra-Konferenz ... Bergen ... : Mitteilungen und Verhandlungen*, ed. Hans Peter Ellingsen Lie. 3 vols. [Leipzig, 1909–10 = Supplementum to *Lepra*, vol. 8 and *Lepra*, vols. 10–11 (1910)], 105–39, at 110. In a series of Royal Proclamations (1650, 1651, 1652 [2], 1655) the new Danish king, Frederick III, gave a farm in each of the county's quarters in order to set up a hospital for the treatment of the disease and provided for support for them. The bishops and the *lögmenn* were charged with finding a suitable candidate to be *forstandari* or *haldari* over each establishment. In the southern quarter, the hospital-farm was first established at Klausturhólar and Brynjólfur had begun a building there for the establishment in 1653. See Páll Eggert Ólason, *Seytjándi öld*, 134–36; Sæmundur Bjarnhéðinsson, “Ágrip,” 54–60; “Leprosy,” 373–77 [111–15]; Erla Dóris Halldórsdóttir, *Holdsveiki á Íslandi* (Reykjavík, 2001), 43–47.

89. On May 12, 1661, Ragnheiður, in the presence of her parents, assembled clergy, and others living at Skálholt (possibly including Steinunn) swore a *bókæiður* (an oath on the Bible [Páll Sigurðsson, 218–19]) that she was a virgin. Ragnheiður was 19 years old and considered most promising (some verse attributed to her is preserved in JS 220 8vo, a collection of *rímur*, poetry, and riddles written by two hands ca. 1820–1860), and the same month that she swore her oath, séra Hallgrímur Pétursson sent her a personally written copy of his fifty psalms on the Passion (*Passúsálmar*). However, she had been at the center of persistent rumors which had reached her father that she was romantically involved with séra Daði Halldórsson, who was not only her tutor, but had for a long time been one of the Bishop's most trusted advisors. This same Daði had been in trouble a year or so before when he had seduced the daughter of the blacksmith at Skálholt, Guðbjörg Sveinsdóttir, and she had borne him twins as a result. Later that same summer the church-pastor (*kirkjuprestur*), séra Sigurður Torfason (1629–1690) resigned his post when one of the young servant women who attended to the cathedral school (a similar position to the one most likely held by Steinunn), Ingibjörg Magnúsdóttir, bore him a child.

On February 15, 1662, Ragnheiður, in “exile” upriver from Skálholt at Bræðratunga where she had sought the protection of Helga Magnúsdóttir, the widow of Hákon *sýslumaður* Gíslason, gave birth to a child and named Daði as the father. Séra Torfi Jónsson í Gaulverjabæ and séra Þórður Þorleifsson á Torfastöðum, the bishop's nephews, brought Brynjólfur the news the following day. He had been unaware his daughter was pregnant. Daði, who had left Skálholt the previous July to be assistant pastor to his father at Hrúni admitted to being the father. In 1662, his relatives agreed to pay an enormous amount in compensation, a hundred of hundreds (*tólfraett*), half in cash or cash equivalents, and half in property. According to the table of equivalents taken from the Royal Ordinance of May 6, 1684, 1

hundred (120) was calculated at 120 (Icelandic) ells (of worsted), 240 fish, or 5 *ríkisdalir* (Halldór Einarsson, *Om Værdie-Beregning paa Landsviis og Tiende-Ydelsen i Island* [Copenhagen, 1833], 53). The fine in goods amounted to 7200 ells, 14400 fish, or 300 *ríkisdalir* and the 60 hundreds in property turned out to be 2½ medium-sized farms freehold. In the 1686 land register these properties were valued as follows: Hörgholt, Hrunamannahreppur, *kúgildi* (cow equivalent) 7; land rent 1½ hundreds; tax value (i.e., sale value) 30 hundreds; and two farms in Gnúpverjahreppur, Skálabúðir, *kúgildi* 5; land rent 80 ells; tax value 13 hundreds, 80 ells; and half Geldingaholt, *kúgildi* 10; land rent 1 hundred, 40 ells; tax value 26 hundreds, 160 ells (Björn Lárusson, *The Old Icelandic Land Registers*, trans. W. F. Salisbury, *Skrifter utgivna av Ekonomisk-historiske Föreningen* 7 [Lund, 1967], 109–10), although for the purpose of the settlement the last two farms must have been valued at fifteen and thirty hundreds respectively. The farms were handed over immediately but the rest of the fine was not paid until 1667. Brynjólfur was one of the more popular, learned and admirable of the seventeenth-century Icelandic magnates, and therefore the subsequent twists of the story become all the more poignant. Ragnheiður died on March 24, 1663, 22 years old, after a long and difficult illness. In 1667 when Brynjólfur learned of the death of his son, Halldór, in England the previous year (Hughes, “Sir Thomas Browne and Iceland,” *English Renaissance Prose* 1 [1987]: 25–47, at 32–33), he brought Ragnheiður’s child, Þórður, home to Skálholt. But the young boy, who was regarded as exceptionally promising, died of a lung infection in 1673. Brynjólfur’s wife, Margrét Halldórsdóttir *lögmanns* Ólafssonar, had died in 1670. Brynjólfur then willed all his considerable wealth to the episcopal see. He died in 1675 in Skálholt, broken and alone (Páll Eggert Ólason, *Seytjándi öld*, 127–28). About all of this a great deal has been written from soon after Brynjólfur’s death right down to the present, for it is the stuff novels and movies are made of. And Steinunn was present for some of the more dramatic moments and like many others in the region would have followed closely the events as they unfolded. For a contemporary evaluation of the Bishop’s behavior in this episode, see Sigurjón Björnsson, “Einkahagir og manngerð Brynjólfs Sveinssonar biskups,” *Brynjólfur biskup: Kirkjuhöfðingi, fræðimaður og skáld*, ed. Jón Pálsson et al. (Reykjavík, 2006), 19–27.

90. This text is printed Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóngs rímur*, xii, and can be translated as follows:

Character Reference for Steinunn Finnsdóttir.

This trustworthy person, Steinunn Finnsdóttir, asks of me these words and appreciation concerning her behavior and conduct such as I know about it, during that time when she has been here in Skálholt at the same time as me, which she says is five years, concerning which character reference I neither wish to nor am able to refuse. Know therefore each and every person who reads or listens to this appreciation, that the said trustworthy young woman Steinunn Finnsdóttir has herself in my experience and knowledge as to words and disposition behaved in a well disposed manner and without fault, that most of all I have known and been aware about her during the said period of time, as befits and behooves a trustworthy and well behaved young woman, for which reason I wish her God’s mercy and good luck in all her honest future endeavors and intentions.

At Skálholt Anno 1662, 10. of June.

Brynjólfur L[upus]L[oriscus = “byrnie-wolf” = “Brynjólfur”]: R[everendus]:

91. Guðrún married Björn Þorsteinsson from Höfn ca. 1690. They had many

children, the most famous being the youngest, born while Steinunn was still known to be alive. This grandson, séra Snorri Björnsson frá Húsafelli (1710–1803), became an accomplished *rímur*-poet. He was one of the first such writers to have their secular compositions published during their lifetimes: *Jóhönnuraunir* (8 fitts) (according to the title-page translated from German and then versified): *Eitt Efentyre er kallast Jóhönnu Rauner* (Hrappsey, 1784; repr., Viðeyjarklaustur, 1829; Reykjavík, 1904); *Rímur af Sigurði snarfara* (13 fitts) (Hrappsey, 1779; [*Ríma af Þorsteini Austfirðingi*]: *Eitt Efenntyre* (Hrappsey, 1781; repr., *Eitt Æfintýri. Ríma*, Reykjavík, 1946). After his death was printed his *Rímur af Arnljóti upplendingakappi* (11 fitts) (Copenhagen, 1833). Only his *Rímur af Hálfðan Brönufóstra* (17 fitts) remain unpublished (Finnur Sigmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 1:290–91, 425, 522–23, 42, 195–96).

92. Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, xii–xiii. It is likely that she was quite comfortable here. Höfn was in private ownership at this time as were most of the farms in Melasveit (Björn Lárusson 140–41). Björn must have owned all or part of the farm (as he considered to be a member of the *Hafnarmenn*). By 1705–14 approximately 50% of the private property was owned by 2% of the population (1024 individuals, men and women, 7.4% of the total number of those owning private land) (Björn Lárusson, *The Old Icelandic Land Registers*, 75).

93. “Snjáskvæði” belongs to two tale types in the Aarne-Thompson classification system. The first is tale type 306 AII, *The Pursuit of the Heavenly Maiden: Following to the Other World*. See Annti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, 2nd rev. ed., FF Communications vol. 75 (= no. 184) (Helsinki, 1961) (= Aarne-Thompson), 199. Now reclassified and subsumed under tale type 306 “The Danced-Out Shoes,” in Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography. Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*, 3 vols., FF Communications 284–86 (Helsinki, 2004) (= Uther), 1:188–89). Einar Ól. Sveinsson who was using the Aarne-Thompson system recognized three Icelandic versions of this variant. See his *Verzeichnis isländischer Märchenvarianten*, FF Communications vol. 28.2 [= no. 83] (Helsinki, 1929), 9–10:

1. “Sagan af Oddi kóngi,” Lbs. 538 4to, collected 1862 from Margrét Jónsdóttir, Undirfelli (1835–1927) (Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, new edition, ed. Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálms, 6 vols. [Reykjavík, 1954–1961] [= Jón Árnason], 4:626–28).
2. *Snjáskvæði*, (*ÍGSVP* 4:29–38).
3. Steinunn’s *Snækóns rímur*.

The second is Aarne-Thompson tale type 306 *The Danced-out Shoes* (98–99) which has three sub-variants: I *Princess as Prize*; II *Discovery of the Secret*; III *Recognition*. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Verzeichnis* 38–39 lists the following variants:

- I.1. “Átta herramannsdætur,” Lbs. 423 8vo, written by Branþrúður Benónisdóttir, (Jón Árnason, 3:460–62).
 2. “Skrifarinn og kona herramannsins,” Lbs. 432 8vo, from Sigurður Jónsson í Möðrudal (1814–1874) (Jón Árnason, 3:459–60).
 3. “Gandreiðin,” Lbs. 417 8vo, from Jón Sigurðsson, Gautlöndum (1828–89) (Jón Árnason, 1:427–28).
 4. “Konan sem fór í Svartaskólann,” Lbs. 423 8vo, from séra Sigurður Gunnarsson, Desjarmýri (Jón Þorkelsson, *Þjóðsögur og munnmæli*, 2nd ed. [Reykjavík, 1956]. 147–48; Jón Árnason, 3:458–59).
- II.1. “Sagan af Oddi kóngi,” from Margrét Jónsdóttir, Undirfelli.
2. “Snjáskvæði,”
 3. Steinunn’s *Snækóns rímur*.

- III.1. “Álfkona leggst með mennskum manni,” Lbs. 541 4to, the *Álfarit* of Ólafur Sveinsson í Purkey (ca. 1762–1845) (Jón Árnason, 1:100).
2. “Hildur álfadrottning,” Lbs. 538 4to, from Katrín (Einarsdóttir) Jónassen, *saumakona* in Reykjavík (1825–1897) (Jón Árnason, 1:105–09).
3. “Úlfhildur álfadrottning,” from Þorvaldur Ólafsson, *Kalastöðum* (Jón Árnason, 1:102–05).
4. “Bóthildur (álfa)drottning,” Lbs. 531 4to, by séra Jón Þórðarson, *Auðkúlu* (1826–1885) (Jón Árnason, 3:166–67).
5. “Húsfreyjan á Yztugrund,” (MS title: “Huldufólk í Stóruborg”), Lbs. 537 4to, by séra Páll Jónsson í Hvammi (1818–1870) who learned it from Jón *sýslumaður* Espólin (Jón Árnason, 3:165–66).
6. “Snotra,” Lbs 423, 8vo, in the hand of Jón Sigurðsson (ca. 1801–1883) from Njarðvík [austur], Borgafjörður, Norður-Múlasýsla (Jón Árnason, 1:109–11).
7. “Álfadrottning í álögum,” Lbs. 537 4yo, from Runólfur Runólfsson, *Holtum* (Jón Árnason, 3:163–64).

94. *Gagraljóð* is a 4-line stanza, each line of 7 syllables (Helgi Sigurðsson, *Safn til bragfræði*, 132–42, *bragaætt* 7 containing 115 varieties). The rhyme scheme is *abab* (masculine rhymes). Unless otherwise noted, lines 1 and 3 have 2 alliterating words, and lines 2 and 4 only 1. *Gagravilla* is a sub-set of *Gagraljóð* in which the *b*-rhyme in the 2nd and 4th lines shows half-rhyme (consonance) with the *a*-rhymes of lines 1 and 3 (91 varieties, 142–50). The form of *gagravilla* used in *Snjáskvæði* is also *stímuð* (i.e., shows *stíma*), that is the first and last words of each line are linked by consonance.

95. In the folktale “Snotra” there is a stanza in *rímur*-metre, either a *lausavísa* or stanza from a lost *Snjárs rímur* (Steinunn Finnisdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, xx):

~~Deiðitvænuarglaðbákuálf~~ dead calf, my queen, you know that yourself, the
~~tróttningur vírþaðaséríghsfálf~~ the king himself became very angry.
 ógurlegt var orðagjálfur
 yfrið reiður varð kóngurinn sjálfur.

In terms of metrical analysis, a stanza such as this is said to be *fleygur*, where an extra syllable is added to the required masculine rhyme. The meter is *samhenda*, and because this stanza has the extra syllables in lines 3 and 4, it is called *samhenda síðfleygur* (Helgi Sigurðsson, *Safn til bragfræði*, 255, *bragaætt* 23, variant 23, anomalous forms).

96. This seems a variant of the *álag* in *Hyndluljóð*.

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TEXTS

ÍGSAV Arnason and Ólafur Davíðsson, eds. *Íslenzkar gátur, skemtanir, vikivakar og þulur*. 4 vols. Copenhagen, 1887–1904. Repr. in 2 vols. [Reykjavík], 1964.

SKJ Finnur Jónsson, ed. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. Vols. AI, AII (tekst efter håndskrifterne) and BI, BII (rettet tekst). Copenhagen, 1912–15. Repr. Copenhagen, 1967 (A), 1973 (B).

JOURNALS

alv *alvíssmál*

ANF *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*

GRM *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift*

JEGP *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*

MLR *Modern Language Review*

Mm *Mál og minne*

MS *Mediaeval Scandinavia*

SVS *Book of the Viking Society*

SS *Scandinavian Studies*

ZDA *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*

Årbog *Årbog for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie*

SERIES

Bb *Bibliotheca Arnarnagagnæana*

Dipl *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. 22 vols. Oslo, 1849–1972. http://www.dokpro.uio.no/dipl_norv/diplom_felt.html.

EA *Editiones Arnarnagagnæanæ*

ÍF *Íslenzk fornrit*

SLG *Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur*

REFERENCE WORKS

Fritzner, Johan. *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*. 4 vols. 4th ed. Oslo, 1972–73. <http://www.edd.uio.no/perl/search/search.cgi>.

KL *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid*. Edited by Lis Jacobsen and John Danstrup. 22 vols. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1956–78.

LEX *Lexicon poeticum antiquae linguae septentrionalis / Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog*. Edited by Finnur Jónsson. 2nd ed. Copenhagen, 1931. First edition by Sveinbjörn Egilsson. Copenhagen, 1860. Unless otherwise noted, references are to the second edition.

DNPR *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose/Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*. Edited by Helle Degenbol, Bent Chr. Jacobsen, Eva Rode, Christopher Sanders, Þorbjörg Helgadóttir. Vol. 1-. Copenhagen, 1989. <http://dataonp.hum.ku.dk/index.html>.

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